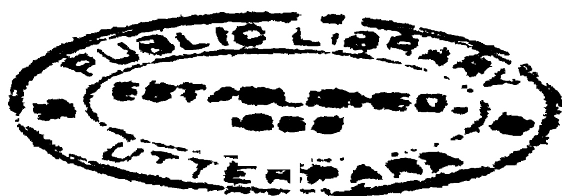


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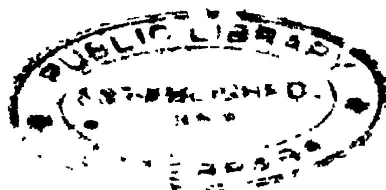
BY

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# PREFACE

THIS little book is not a mere abridgment of any *History* or *Histories* of the subject which the author has already written. He has endeavoured to utilise in it, not merely the experience thus gained, and the reading of more than half a century, but also the knowledge, of what is likely to be required by its possible users, furnished by practice long ago as a schoolmaster both in England and in Scotland, and more recently as a Professor of the matter and an Examiner in many different Universities.

No information that the book gives is intended to supersede, and all information that it gives is intended to encourage and lead up to, the reading of the literature itself. For an Introduction of this sort, rhetorical praises of that literature, generally or as concerns individuals, elaborate discussions of disputed points, attempts to make an interesting "story," and other things of the kind (even perhaps those efforts to introduce politics, social matters, etc., which have recently been so popular), are not really so important as the drawing in outlines, as clear and strong as possible, of the actual progress and development of the actual literature as such. A conception of this is the foundation of all knowledge on the subject: it can be impressed, not indeed upon mere children, but as soon as some

knowledge of individual authors like Scott and Shakespeare, and collections like *The Golden Treasury*, has been secured; and experience shows that it is very commonly wanting even at an advanced school stage and later. This little book is an endeavour to supply it.

I would, without "presuming to dictate," invite special attention, from teachers and students alike, to the Contents and the appended Conspectus and Glossary. They may look like mere obligatory mechanical furniture: if attended to, they will, I think, prevent some shortcomings which are too often painfully obvious. So far as Literary History is useful at all, as an assistance to actual reading and as (though never a substitute for it) a stop-gap for that which cannot be at the time achieved, it can only perform its duty by supplying that mind-map of the general subject on which something has been said above. Attention to names and dates may be overdone, and over-attention to them may disgust some very promising pupils; but neglect of them is fatal. Of attention to technical details of diction and versification exactly the same may be said, and unless this attention to both matters is established early it is not often established at all. In the almost life-long experience above referred to, I have found, not merely by raw schoolboys, but by candidates for the highest Government and University examinations, Layamon confused with Lydgate, Dryden put before Jonson, a passage of obviously Spenserian diction bestowed upon Chaucer, and a piece of as obviously Spenserian stanza attributed to Milton.

Finally, I have aimed at being as much as possible *understandable*, without "writing down," and as little as possible *quotable*. Nothing is more exasperating to

examiners, and nothing more deleterious to students, than the repetition of well-sounding phrases obviously got by rote, and connoting no knowledge in the writer. For my own part I always tell my students that if, in examinations, they repeat my lecture- or book-phrases I shall "mark them down." All I wish to do, and all I pretend to do, is to teach them how to read. And all this book attempts is to be a *gradus ad lectionem*, in which I have tried to give as much as possible of what ought to be learnt, nothing, so far as I could manage it, that will have to be unlearnt, and especially nothing of the windy talk which is bad everywhere, and nowhere worse than here.[1]

GEORGE SAINTSBURY.

EDINBURGH,
*Candlemas* 1914.

[1] I have to acknowledge much valuable help from Professors Ker and Gregory Smith and from my colleague Mr. A. Blyth Webster.

# CONTENTS

## CHAPTER I



## CHAPTER II

## CHAPTER III

### BETWEEN CHAUCER AND SPENSER



## CHAPTER IV

### THE GREAT ELIZABETHAN PERIOD



## CHAPTER V

### JACOBEAN AND CAROLINE LITERATURE

## CHAPTER VI

### THE AUGUSTAN OR NEO-CLASSIC PERIOD, 1660–1798



## CHAPTER VII

### THE FIRST ROMANTIC PERIOD

*Early Nineteenth-century Literature*, 1798–1834

## CHAPTER VIII

### VICTORIAN LITERATURE



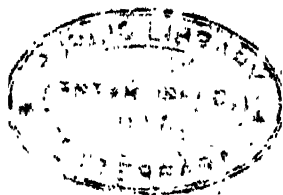
### GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL TERMS

# CONTRACTIONS USED IN TEXT[1]

A.S. = Anglo-Saxon = Old English.
M.E. = Middle English.
MS. = Manuscript. MSS. = Manuscripts.
O.E. = Old English = Anglo-Saxon.

*Short Initial and other Contractions.*—*b.* = "born"; *c.* = *circa*, "about"; *d.* = "died"; *v.d.* = "various dates"; *fl.* = "flourished." "?" after a date means that there is no certain information on the subject, but that the year given is the most probable.

[1] It seemed better to use these than to expand them, because they are usual elsewhere, and should become familiar as early as possible. Further explanations of some (as well as, generally speaking, of all words put in inverted commas in text) will be found in the Glossary.



# CHAPTER I

## OLD ENGLISH OR ANGLO-SAXON LITERATURE

General scope of chapter—A.S. verse—Its characteristics and relation to modern poetry—Examples: *Beowulf*—Stories in fragment: *Widsith*, etc.—*Deor*: its importance—Miscellaneous poems: Profane and Sacred—Cædmon—*Genesis* and *Exodus*—"Cynewulf"—Saints' Lives—Miscellaneous pieces—General features of A.S. poetry—A.S. prose—*Chronicle*, *Apollonius*, Works of Alfred and Ælfric, etc.—Different styles in prose—An English library *c.* A.D. 1066.

**General scope of chapter.**

THE stock of Old English or Anglo-Saxon literature which we possess is not large, nor is it extremely varied; but it is both large enough and varied enough to give us, in all reasonable probability, a fair proportional representation of that literature in its entirety. The period of its production is a very long one—certainly one of 500 years from *c.* A.D. 500 to *c.* 1000, with a few outlying examples later than the more modern date, and an unknown extension of time backwards from the more ancient. It is divided, like all other literatures, into verse and prose; and, as in almost all others, the verse appears to be earlier than the prose, though the prose is unusually early.

**A.S. verse.**

This verse, however, of which we possess enough to fill two or three pretty large volumes, is distinguished from that of almost all other literatures by being written

in one metre, or substitute for metre,[1] which is itself almost peculiar to the group of Teutonic languages, of which A.S. is one. The lines or staves, which are not in the original MSS. divided from each other, consist of two halves, with a strong division (marked in some MSS. themselves) between them. In each of these halves there is a certain number of obviously *accented* syllables (usually two in the first, and at least one in the second) which are also *alliterated* (that is to say, they begin with the same consonant, or with a vowel).

**Its characteristics and relation to modern poetry.**

Proper study of this verse, as soon as there is time and opportunity, is not only desirable but almost necessary for complete comprehension of later English poetry. It is quite true that the exact structure of it cannot be copied in present-day English, for reasons which will be unfolded later. Attempts to do so are either ugly, monotonous, and unsatisfactory to the modern English ear, or else (such as, for instance, some of Charles Kingsley's verses) agreeable but really quite different from the original cadence and construction.[2] But this matters little. What matters very much is that we can find, in this verse, things not only still noticeable in English poetry but positively characteristic and distinctive of it. The great prominence of *accent* is one of these. It is very unsafe to say, as is so often said, that the structure of English verse during modern times depends wholly upon accent. It does not; but accent is, beyond all doubt, the main, though not the only, factor in qualifying English words for their position in the verse or line. *Alliteration*, again, has nothing now to do with the *structure* of our verse; but

[1] "Metre" being taken as = "regularised rhythm" (see Glossary). There is well-marked rhythm in A.S., but whether the markings repeat themselves with sufficient regularity is a moot question.

[2] For examples of this see Glossary. The later, or 14th century form (see pp. 26, 29) is rather more nearly manageable.

as an ornament it has persisted—sometimes in spite of strong attempts to make little of it—throughout our poetical history; and no one has made more abundant and delightful use of it than the last great English poet, not now living, Mr. Swinburne. The exclusive importance of the *central pause* has ceased, and attempts to revive it have been in most cases unsuccessful; but the importance of the *varied* pause has been greater than in any other language, and has supplied one of their main instruments to such poets as Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, and Tennyson. But the most important characteristic by far of A.S. poetry for the modern student is none of these. It is that apparent *irregularity* which has been noticed, but which really means, not a haphazard distribution of unaccented syllables "left to take care of themselves," but a recognition of the fact that groups of syllables of different lengths can hold *equivalent* positions. To what extent this Equivalence is present in A.S., according to definite rules, is a question on which doctors differ: that it exists, after this fashion or that, no one with an ear who has heard or read a reasonable quantity of A.S. verse can doubt. Now this Equivalence—which exists in more limited forms in Greek and Latin, but which is totally absent from, for instance, French—has (though seldom critically recognised, and sometimes strenuously denied) existed in forms more exact than those of A.S., but more free than those of the classics, throughout the whole range of English poetry, and has constituted the secret of the charm of the verse of most of our greatest poets. Chaucer used it; by it Shakespeare improved the fine but rather stiff blank verse of his predecessors into the greatest medium of all poetic history; Milton, though some would question his use of it, in reality owes to that use most of the charm of his verse and all

its variety; Coleridge, not quite knowing what he did, revived it magnificently in *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*; and all great poets since—Tennyson and Browning more especially—have employed it lavishly. There can be no doubt, in the mind of any one who has studied the phenomena of comparative literature to good result, that this modern Equivalence has its origin in the peculiar character of A.S. verse, and has been maintained by the presence of the A.S. element in the language and in the people.

Examples: *Beowulf.*

Among the examples which we possess of this verse, the bulkiest, the most important, and in the popular sense the most interesting is the tale of *Beowulf*—the only extant representative of epic, *saga*, or verse-romance in A.S. There is no certain reference to anything English in this poem; and though the unique MS. which we possess (and which has come down to us through great perils of fire and other destructive chances) is probably not older than the tenth century, the actual poem would seem more likely to have been written before our ancestors left the Continent. Carefully explored coincidences of name connect it with the beginning of the sixth century or the close of the fifth. But these and other matters concerning it are for larger histories than the present. For us it must be sufficient to say that *Beowulf* is a poem of rather more than 3000 lines divided into two unequal portions. The latter, smaller, and less interesting of these tells how the hero—now grown old and a king—saves his country from the ravages of a fire-drake (dragon). The former—longer and by far more interesting—deals with his expedition, while still a thane of King Hygelac (a name which gives the supposed historical connection), to succour another monarch, Hrothgar of Heorot, whose palace is the prey of a night-monster called Grendel—superhuman and

invulnerable by ordinary steel, but not immortal. Beowulf wrestles with the monster and tears off his arm, thereby killing him. But Grendel's mother renews the attacks on Heorot, and it is clear that the only way to finish the matter is to descend into the lake which is the monster's home and bring the hag to bay. This Beowulf does, and after being nearly beaten by his enemy, finds on the floor of the cavern a magic falchion, with which he cuts off her head, and that of the dead Grendel afterwards, though the sword itself, having performed its work, melts in the blood of the fiends. These are only the central incidents of a considerable story which gives us journeys by land and sea, not a little effective description of wild country and of the hospitable court-halls, admirable fighting, not bad feasting, and even a certain delineation of manners, if not exactly of character.

**Stories in fragment: *Widsith,* etc.**

The other remains of this "epic," and probably oldest division of A.S., four in number, are all short, and with one exception all fragmentary. This exception is a curious poem called *Widsith* or *The Far-Traveller*, which, in the form in which we have it, has, to something like certainty, been much rewritten and interpolated. It professes to summarise the peregrinations and the patronages of a wandering bard. Another member of the same (at that time) important profession has left us what is called *The Complaint of Deor*, a much more important and poetical piece, recording the supersession of the author in favour, and his attempt to comfort himself by recalling others' sufferings, and by the recollection that "as their woes went over so may his." This last phrase forms what is called a "refrain" or burden, the oldest in our language, and this refrain in turn, by its recurrence, makes something like regular stanzas out of the mere batches of the usual line. Hence

**_Deor_. its importance.**

*Deor* is sometimes (and correctly from one point of view) called " the only lyric in A.S."

The other two are exceedingly spirited but unfortunately short fragments of warlike story. One, *Waldhere*, connects itself with the great legend-history of Attila and the Burgundian kingdom, and we have the context in Latin ; the other, called *The Fight at Finnsburg*, gives part account of one of the conflagrations of wood-built strongholds so frequent in Scandinavian history, and has a connection of reference with *Beowulf*. Indeed the counter-references and connections in this limited stock of verse are relatively so numerous that one imagines the total of it not to have been originally very large.

Miscellaneous poems : Profane

This small but probably very ancient body of romance or romanced history has no genuine evidence of Christianity in it, and much that goes the other way. Outside of it we have another, probably a more modern, and (if we leave *Beowulf* out of the question) rather though not much larger body of pieces, not religious in character, or with such religious character as there is probably interpolated. This consists of a curious body of *Riddles* or elaborately metaphorical verse-descriptions of natural phenomena, etc. ; of a fragment of description of a sacked and wrecked city (very possibly Bath), called *The Ruin* ; of two remarkable allegories of human life (at least this seems the most probable interpretation, in their case, of the misty metaphorical diction of which A.S. poetry consists), to which the names of *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* have been given ; and of two other much smaller pieces, which have been christened, with an even more imaginative latitude, *The Wife's Complaint* and *The Husband's* or *Lover's Message*. There is good work in all of these ; and *The Ruin* is perhaps the finest thing in A.S. poetry.

The great mass of that poetry, however, is occupied with very different subjects, and comes under the denomination of "Sacred," consisting partly of Translations or Paraphrases of the Scriptures, partly of Saints' Lives, and partly of miscellaneous pieces of a religious character. The first division, in its most interesting and probably oldest part—versions of *Genesis* and *Exodus* with large traditional additions—connects itself with the famous story told by Bede—the very beginning of English literary history of the personal kind—the story of Cædmon, the herdsman or cowstall-keeper of Whitby, of his bashfulness at being unable to take part in the singing usual at Saxon feasts, of his retirement to his charge, and of his inspiration by an angel to sing of the Creation and the Creator. The version which we possess (though later, and in West Saxon, not Northumbrian, as Cædmon's own would have been) has fairly demonstrable connection with this story; and, though probably not by one hand, contains very fine passages. Our actual MS. belonged to Archbishop Usher, and was edited by Junius, a Dutch friend of Milton, who himself seems to have taken some touches from it for *Paradise Lost*.

**and Sacred.**

**Cædmon.**

***Genesis* and *Exodus*.**

No other name is historically associated with any part of A.S. poetry; but for a large and interesting batch of it the ingenuity of scholars has found another in a certain or uncertain "Cynewulf," whose name is supposed to be signed to these pieces, divers "runes" or antique letters composing or suggesting that name being discovered in them; and who has been fitted out, from these and others, not merely with a considerable body of poems, but with a personality, sorrows, joys, sins, repentances, etc. Everybody may believe in Cynewulf or not just as they like; but it is well to know what has been said about him. It is certain that there are fine things in the poems attributed to him; though

**"Cynewulf."**

most of them may be, and many certainly are, translated or adapted from Latin or other originals. The *Andreas*, an account of the miracles and martyrdom of St. Andrew, has no doubt a Greek origin; but by comparison with a later Middle English version which we also possess, we can see how freely the imitators used their sources. In this and in other remaining Saints' Lives—whether by Cynewulf, or another, or many others, does not in the least matter—the *Elene* or story of the finding of the Cross by the mother of Constantine, the *Guthlac* (that of a saint tormented by the fiends of the Crowland fens), the *Juliana* (of a Christian girl persecuted by the heathen and tempted by the devil)—the same qualities which distinguish the *Ruin* and its group may be found, as also in a batch of pieces, likewise attributed to the supposed Cynewulf, found in our principal collection of miscellaneous O.E. work, the "Exeter Book," and collectively called *Christ*. These qualities are again discoverable in some other Biblical versions, especially a fine one of the Apocryphal book of *Judith*, a grim *Address of the Soul to the Body*, and a *Dream of the Rood* [Cross], which has the additional interest of corresponding with passages found engraved on the Ruthwell Cross in Dumfriesshire, and on a reliquary at Brussels; and in yet other pieces too many to particularise, down to a singular and only in part intelligible "Rhyming Poem," not much older than the Conquest, and to the admirable *Grave* piece ("For thee was a house built"), better known than almost any other A.S. verse to modern readers through Longfellow's translation.

Saints' Lives.

Miscellaneous pieces.

These qualities may be exaggerated, but can hardly escape notice. The apparent *roughness* of the poetry will not be much against it for long with an attentive reader, who has either a naturally sensitive or a well-trained ear. But its comparative *monotony* will produce

General features of A.S. poetry.

a more lasting effect, and will be, sooner or later, felt to be its principal drawback. Further, this monotony of form will be found to be somewhat incompatible with variety of tone in subject and temper. Brightness, cheerfulness, merriment are not things frequent in A.S. verse: its most congenial matter seems to lie in, and certainly its finest efforts are connected with, fate ("weird"), death, scenes of wildness and gloom, lamentation, sufferings, struggle. For such themes the low and almost unbroken " croon " of the rhythm—resting upon what is technically termed a " trochaic " basis—furnishes an excellent medium; and the profusion of metaphorical or allegorical periphrases which is the main characteristic of the diction adapts itself happily to the subjects. There is dignity, sincerity, and a kind of passion—chiefly religious or martial.[1] But there is hardly any love-poetry, and no attempt at light, bright, glancing, and dancing measures, expressive of the joy of life, the beauty of nature and humanity. The late Mr. Matthew Arnold, who thought " high seriousness " the greatest quality of poetry, ought to have been more satisfied with Anglo-Saxon than he apparently was.

**A.S. prose.**

The prose, naturally enough, escapes this monotony to some extent in subject and to a much greater in form. We have indeed here also a comparatively great bulk of religious matter—translations of the Scriptures and of works of St. Augustine and St. Gregory, and very many " Homilies " or short sermons, more Saints' Lives, etc. But we have also the famous Anglo-Saxon *Chronicle*, the oldest vernacular and contemporary history in the literature of the modern world; the translations (with

***Chronicle*, *Apollonius* Works of Alfred and Ælfric, etc.**

[1] As, for instance, in the historical pieces about the Battles of Brunanburgh and Maldon. It may be added that *beauty* of description, though rare, is by no means unknown, as for instance in the fine allegorical-religious poem of the *Phœnix*, adapted from the Latin of Lactantius.

considerable original insertions here and there) made by or under the direction of King Alfred, from Bede, Orosius, Boethius; at least one remarkable prose tale, *Apol'onius of Tyre*; some quasi-philosophical and scientific treatises, "leechdoms" (medical prescriptions), and other miscellanies, including an amusing and useful *Colloquy*, Latin and English, describing (and intended to be used for) the instruction of young and unlearned persons in the learned language. We know, too, much more about the actual authors of much of this prose, King Alfred himself, Abbot Ælfric or Elfric, Bishop Werfrith, Archbishop Wulfstan, though many of the Homilies (including a collection, in part of no small literary merit, called, from the house in Norfolk which preserved them, the *Blickling Homilies*) are anonymous. And though perhaps there is nothing so fine from a literary point of view as the best pieces of fierce or gloomy or passionately religious verse noticed above, there is a more varied interest, not merely of subject, but, what is very rare, even to a certain extent of form.

**Different styles in prose.**

The Old English writers had, as we have seen, practically only one style in verse, which hardly changed at all, or was at any rate subjected, when West Saxon became dominant, to what is called in modern times "standardisation." The prose-writers—as is natural—were under less restraint. It is probable that at first they formed themselves somewhat on Latin—the language which seems to have been used for formal documents up to the sixth or even the seventh century. But almost at this latter date we find a natural easy way of writing, much less Latinised than some of the greatest English prose a thousand years later. And this (which begins with a famous scene of fighting between a King Cynewulf—not the imagined poet—and a rebellious and regicide thane of his) goes on quite naturally, varying itself

with the historical entries and the translations, the reports of Alfred's captains as to their voyages to the Baltic and the White Sea, the stories inset in the Homilies (for the "Dark" and "Middle" Ages liked their sermons to be interesting), the little romance of Apollonius and his wreck, and his ball-playing and his fiddle-playing and his fascination of the king's daughter—and evolving a really good *narrative* style, though not perhaps one suitable for other purposes. Side by side, however, with this plain style there arose another, more ornate and artificial, which was used, again by the Homily writers, to dignify and ornament their subjects. In this the diction, the arrangement, and even the very accent- and alliteration-system of the verse were borrowed to an extent which varied, and which we can trace in different stages, but which at its furthest, as in some Homilies of Ælfric, made very little difference, except in regularity of correspondence, between prose and verse. In fact we may, without impropriety, see in this ornamental prose the "ancient mother" of things to which we shall come later, like the prose-verse of Macpherson, Blake, and Whitman, and the batches of inserted blank verse in Chaucer and in Ruskin.

Thus it should be observed that if the actual performance of A.S. literature, considering the great length of time (as long as from Chaucer to Swinburne) which it had to develop itself, was not great, there were in it germs of the most promising and powerful character, requiring only *something* to cultivate and evolve them. It must be clear that if this could not be done in half a millennium by the internal resources of the language and the people, the principle or "coefficient" of evolution must be supplied from without. It was so in good time; and in the next chapter we shall see when, by what, and how.

There is probably no better way of summarising the literary history of a nation characteristically, and in a fashion likely to be remembered, than by giving, as it were, a short catalogue under heads of its library at successive times, so as to answer the question, "What reading would have been possible for a fairly educated person, able and desirous to read, towards the close of the Early English or Anglo-Saxon period, supposing there to have been a great public library at the time?"

One thing somewhat noticeable is that though he would have had, except in paraphrase largely adulterated with fiction, only small portions of the Bible that is commonly read now, he would have had some. And we may say next, though not quite with equal positiveness, that he would have had nothing or next to nothing corresponding to entire and large divisions of our modern libraries. No drama, no prose fiction of any length, little (though this is not quite uncontested) profane poetry, miscellaneous in subject and lyric in form; indeed very little of what is called miscellaneous literature generally. But in verse-story he would have had *Beowulf*, with an uncertain number of other more or less similar romances or epics (call them which you will) of war, adventure, and the marvellous. The natural demand for fiction (whether it was recognised as fiction or not does not matter) was further met by a certain number of short prose tales, of which *Apollonius of Tyre* is our main if not our only representative. Some original history of his own country, the *Chronicle*, with perhaps other stuff of the same kind, was accompanied by translated histories of his own and others—the work of Alfred at its head, and perhaps forming its main body. He had a certain amount of scientific (chiefly medical) writings, and a few "oddments." On the other hand, he had a relatively large religious collection—the Paraphrases above referred to; the "Saints' Lives"; a good body of short sermons, sometimes admirably written; and more or less sacred poetry.

There must thus have been a certain want of breadth and variety in our imaginary Anglo-Saxon student's reading,

the effects of which must have been deepened by the absolute monotony of the form of the verse, which was his most imaginative food. The English library, like the English language and the English people, needed crossing and blending. And all the three got them.

# CHAPTER II

## MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE, A.D. 1200–1400

Circumstances of the change from Old to Middle English—Length of the transition—Results of it about A.D. 1200—Layamon—The *Ormulum*—The *Moral Ode*—The *Ancren Riwle*—Literature from 1200 to 1250—The new *Genesis and Exodus*, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, etc.—Real interest in early M.E. literature—Fresh beginning after apparent lull about 1298—Robert of Gloucester and verse-history—"Romance," its origin and subject—Its literary character—English examples—The alliterative revival—Lyric—Hampole—The fourteenth century—Prose and drama—The appearance of great individual writers—Langland—*The Vision of Piers Plowman*—Gower—The *Confessio Amantis*—Chaucer—His general character and earlier work—*The Canterbury Tales*—Great advance of literary character in them—Account of this in detail—Chaucer's diction—His versification—His prose—The library in 1400.

**Circumstances of the change from Old to Middle English.**

It will have been seen from the last chapter that Old English, or Anglo-Saxon, literature was by no means "poor and beggarly," but that it was limited, and that certain inherent deficiencies made it unable to exceed its limits without external help. For a time it seemed as if the external influence would be one rather of hindrance. The old delusion that the Norman Conquest directly killed Anglo-Saxon, though it has not perhaps entirely disappeared, is a delusion. The language had been failing in literary power long before, and hardly any original documents of importance (except a few scraps) seem to have been written after A.D. 1000. But

the indirect effects of the Conquest were undoubtedly at first very unfavourable to the resuscitation of the native literature. French had already been a Court language in the time of Edward the Confessor. It naturally became the Court language of the Norman and Angevin kings. As late as the time of Richard Cœur de Lion the king of England could not speak English; and a little earlier it was regarded as extraordinary that the famous Abbot Samson of Bury St. Edmunds could not only preach in English but actually read English books. In the monasteries—the main if not the only homes of learning—French and Latin were the recognised languages: in the schools, French was the language in which boys were taught Latin and into which they construed it. We do not know how much we may have lost by the destruction of English writings or by using the old parchments for newer matter in one or other of the favoured tongues.

**Length of the transition.**

But anything English takes a deal of killing; and of all nations and languages in recorded history the English nation and the English language have had the greatest power of assimilating foreign elements without surrendering their native character. In this case the process of blending was long; it could hardly be otherwise, considering the manners and habits of the times, the course of political history, and not least the exhausted or half-exhausted condition of A.S. which has been noticed. From the two centuries between 1000 and 1200 we possess but scraps of verse and prose, the former visibly altering in form but of little consequence except to somewhat advanced students. A little after the later date there appear three documents of great bulk and real importance—two in verse, and one in prose—the *Brut*, a British history by the Shropshire priest Layamon; the *Ormulum* (so called from its author, Orm or Ormin,

**Results of it about A.D. 1200.**

a monk perhaps of Durham, perhaps of East Anglia), which consists of paraphrases of the Church Gospels for each day; and the *Ancren Riwle* (" Rule of Anchoresses" or irregular nuns), by a writer not certainly identified. In these, though they are close enough to O.E. to have been at one time called " Semi-Saxon," the most remarkable differences from it appear. These differences are not so very marked in the actual vocabulary—there are only a few score of " Romance " words (that is, words freshly imported from French or Latin) in the 32,000 lines or half-lines of the *Brut*. But there are not a few changes in grammar; and those in versification are unmistakable and most striking.

Layamon. In the *Brut*, for instance, the writer has an abundance of interesting, though mostly if not entirely legendary, matter to tell us. Here, for the first time in English, we meet the story of King Arthur, which had been popularised in Latin by Geoffrey of Monmouth some fifty or sixty years earlier, and by others in French since. This is not indeed the full romantic Arthuriad with the Quest of the Graal, the adventures of knights-errant, and the loves of Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere for its most important part. But it is the fullest account, up to its own date, of what may be called the quasi-historical part of the matter—the birth and succession of Arthur; his wars with Saxons and Romans; the treason of his wife and nephew; and his reconquest of his kingdom at the price of his own life. And it contains a new and important item of the purely romantic kind—the passing of the king under the hands of a magic queen (here called " Argantè ") and the " elves." There is also much else of interest—the story of Rowena and her beguilement of Vortigern being a sample of one kind, and that of Oriene (more commonly known as St. Ursula) and her corps of maidens or children,

murdered by Pagans, and others. Some have even called it "the first English romance." But, historically, the main interest of Layamon is in his versification, which tells us how—and how in a very much wider scope than that of mere versification—the foundation of our actual English language and literature was at this time being laid. That the author was not consciously throwing away the old A.S. method altogether is clear; that something constantly prevents him from achieving it in anything like a competent fashion is clearer; and that something else is as constantly present is clearest of all. Now this "something else" is of the highest possible importance. Never, even by accident, does the old Anglo-Saxon line or distich fall into two halves of regular iambic cadence, with four "feet" in each and rhymed at the end. Layamon's book contains many such "couplets" or "distichs," some quite perfect, such as this in the story of Lear (which is very fully told):

> Gorno|illè | was swi|the waer
> Swa beoth wifmen welhwaer
>
> (*Goneril was very ware* [="wary"]
> *So be women everywhere*)

others more or less so. And (the most important point of all) in a second version, about fifty years later, there are many more completely rhymed examples. Now this metre (the so-called "octosyllabic couplet") had been common in later or "low" Latin and commoner in French; and in it we perceive the first and most important blending or importation of Romance material into English.

The matter of the *Ormulum* is less interesting, for, as has been said, it is only a sort of sermon-paraphrase of the Gospels and the Acts,[1] and a dull one. But its form **The *Ormulum***

[1] This was the original plan; but we actually possess only part of the Gospels. It begins (notice the curious spelling with the doubled

is very interesting indeed; and enforces the same lesson as that of the *Brut*, with a variation which positively strengthens it. Layamon was—for the two were pretty certainly near contemporaries—hesitating or staggering between two models. Orm—whether he got the idea of his verse from Latin, or from French, or from anything else—adopted a form which is more close to French *in principle* than to any other language. His lines, invariably, are of fifteen syllables in length, or (if you divide the long line into two) eight and seven. As this division is always possible, you have an equally invariable pause, break, or "caesura" at the eighth syllable. Yet further, these lines are composed, invariably, of iambic feet with no substitution, but with an extra syllable or half-foot at the end of the second half-line. In all these points the metre is directly opposed to Anglo-Saxon principles. And though in another and a single point—rhymelessness—it keeps to those principles, the reason is probably a very simple one, that the author did not feel himself equal to the task of providing so many rhymes.

The *Moral Ode*.

But he had contemporaries who were bolder, though not so long-winded. The interesting piece called the *Moral Ode* or *Poem* is possibly older than the *Ormulum*, which it resembles in metre as far as the metrical skeleton goes.

(now) (in) (= years) (in)
Ich am | nu el|der than | I was | a win|trè and | a lo|rè
(wield, *i.e.* can do) (did)
Ich weal|de mo|rè than | I dude |, mi wit|oh[t] to | be mo|rè.

---

consonants, intended to show the short pronunciation of the vowels)

Thiss boc is nemmnedd Ormulum
(*because*) Forrthi thatt Orrmin itt wrohhte.

And the author, almost anticipating Ascham centuries later, speaks of himself as

Icc thatt thiss Ennglissh hafè sett
Ennglisshè men to lare (*learn*).

But the iambic "fifteeners" rhyme, and they are much less monotonous, admitting substitution to some extent, and, although permitting, not so much inviting division into halves.

There are not a few other poems of varying lengths, dated by scholars from 1200 or a little before to 1250 or a little later; and invariably teaching the same lesson, that of a revival in English verse produced by the example and the actual admixture of French. The admixture of actual French works was still not very large, and it is quite erroneous to say that our prosody "became French." For it retained obstinately that principle of substitution to which French is repugnant, and there are more and more appearances in it of the anapaest (⏑⏑–), a foot which Old French scholars will not allow in Old French poetry at all.

The prose of this period is less interesting, but not without attraction. The *Ancren Riwle* itself—the largest early document—has considerable interest of matter, for the advice given to the anchoresses (ladies who adopted a monastic life without binding themselves to any regular order) is kindly in temper and shrewd in wits, while some of the doctrinal and sermon-like passages are of a relatively high kind of eloquence. Whether it had a Latin or French original (the occurrence of actual French words suggests the latter) or not, it displays a command of prose style for various purposes which we do not find in A.S., and the same may be said of some minor prose tracts, all of them likewise religious in tone and subject. *The Ancren Riwle.*

What has, therefore, to be remembered as regards the period from the Conquest to about 1250 is that the first 100 or 150 years are almost a blank in positive results for us, though some of the latest A.S. literature certainly dates from the earlier part of them, and some of the

earliest M.E. literature may date from the later part. But from 1200 to 1250 there was, almost certainly, a considerable production, all of it that we still possess exhibiting, with the cautions just given, the process of learning from French. This production culminated, though there are other interesting examples, in two remarkable pieces of verse representing the working of this French influence in different ways. These are a new *Genesis and Exodus*, interesting to compare with the old A.S. one, but still more interesting to compare with its contemporary *The Owl and the Nightingale*, a dispute or "debate" between the two birds as to their merits. Both of these pieces are written in the rhymed octosyllabic couplet, into which Layamon had so often stumbled, and which his rehandler (see above) was at this same time multiplying. But *Genesis and Exodus* inclines more to the English side of variety and substitution (being in fact an anticipation of the metre of Spenser's *February* and Coleridge's *Christabel*), while *The Owl and the Nightingale* is closer to the French system of uniformity in number of syllables.

Literature from 1200 to 1250.

The new *Genesis and Exodus*, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, etc.

It may seem, perhaps, to a hasty reader that this is all dry and mechanical stuff, that the power, the beauty, the enjoyment which people hope to get, and are entitled to get, from literature are not here. But this is certainly an example of the haste which is not speed—of the haste which, as Dante says, "disgraces all work." If there is no very great power or beauty in the pieces mentioned already, and in others of the time, it is precisely for want of the education (as we may call it) which this dry and mechanical practice of form, with the concomitant influence exercised on diction and grammar, was providing. Interest and enjoyment are certainly present for any one who will take the very slight trouble necessary to get at them. There is kindliness, good sense,

Real interest in early M.E. literature.

and a certain poetry of religion in the *Ancren Riwle*, which becomes actually powerful and passionate in some other pious pieces.[1] There is actual story-interest in the *Brut*. In *The Owl and the Nightingale* there is the beginning of the quaint light satiric vein which, in the very same form, was later to give us Butler and Swift and Prior; while the paraphrase of *Genesis and Exodus* really foretells something of the spirit and narrative force that Coleridge and Scott were, still longer afterwards, to get out of the metre. In the *Proverbs* of Alfred and of Hendyng there is the curious presence — already in the very terms we use — of those world-old formulations of popular wisdom which make one almost wonder at popular folly, such as "Burnt child fire dreads" and "Far from eye, far from mind."

For some reason there would appear to have been little—or little now surviving—produced during the earlier part of the second half of the thirteenth century (1250–1300); but the processes just described were certainly going on, and it is probable that not a little work which we find only in MSS. of a later date was originally written now. At any rate, in the last years of the century and the earliest of the next, three most remarkable new provinces of literature were opened or reopened to English, which was now at last provided with the proper apparatus for cultivating them. The first was History. This, after the noteworthy achievement of A.S. in prose, lasting up to the middle of the twelfth century, had been wholly abandoned to Latin—in which language English writers, William of Malmesbury and others, form quite a creditable school, though one that does not concern us. But (apparently in 1298,

Fresh beginning after apparent lull about 1298.

[1] Especially *The Wooing of Our Lord* (the most emotional), and the manlier *Soul's Ward*.

just 500 years before Wordsworth and Coleridge, in *Lyrical Ballads*, again began a new stage in English literature, and at the same time recalled attention to mediaeval literature itself) Robert of Gloucester wrote a capital verse-chronicle in pretty regular rhymed fourteener or fifteener couplets,[1] often displaying much spirit. The same author is thought, on good grounds, to have been at least partly responsible for a very large and very interesting collection of *Saints' Lives*, which was frequently, as we should say now, "re-edited," and which formed (the probably true original stories being embroidered and amplified by tradition) a body of what we may almost call religious novels.

Robert of Gloucester and verse-history.

"Romance," its origin and subject.

Many of these stories—such as those of St. Margaret, St. Catherine, St. Dorothea, St. Eustace, and others—are extremely beautiful, and positively "romantic" in the best modern sense of that word. Indeed it has been thought, with good grounds of argument, that they may have been the originals, or part-originals at

[1] The "fourteeners" ending in a "masculine" or single rhyme, the "fifteeners" in a "feminine" or double, supplied by the final *e*. How easily and spiritedly this metre, at so early a time, can run may be seen from the following lines on St. Dunstan, modernised in only the slightest degree of spelling, etc., so as not to interfere with the appreciation.

(would not)
And, for he *nolde* by his will [at] no time idle be
(see about—get)
A private smithy by his cell he 'gan him to *be-see*,
(from)
For when he must *of* orisons, rest[è] for weariness,
(s)
To work he would his hand*en* do, to fly [from] idleness.
(e)
Serv*i* he would[è] poor[è] men, the while he might [en]dure
(took no hire of man)
All the day for the love of God, he ne kept of man none hire,
And when he sat at his work there, his hand[en] at his deed
(prayed his prayers)
And his heart with Jesus Christ, his mouth his bedes bede,
(,) (places)
So that all at one time, he was at three stedes,
His hand[en] there, his heart at God, his mouth to bid his bedes.

least, of the profane Romance[1] itself—the story of knight-errantry and love, often with a strong religious element remaining—which had arisen (chiefly in France or in French, but in a manner very difficult to comprehend exactly) during the very late eleventh or early twelfth century. It developed partly and almost imperceptibly, on the one side from an earlier class of poem, the French *Chansons de Geste*, or family epics with Charlemagne and his peers for centre, on the other from "romantic" treatment of classical stories. But between these was another great branch—the greatest of all—which, sprung from the Arthurian stories noticed under Layamon, combined these with the religious-mystical legend of the Holy Grail or Vessel of the Last Supper; the purely "romantic" one of the love of Sir Lancelot for Queen Guinevere, and, in parts, a large number of lesser romances, each with its special knight-hero, but in not a few cases arising out of, or artificially connected with, the main Arthurian legend. To whom the combination of these various elements may have been due is not certainly known; but the most important part is assigned in MSS. to Walter Map or Mapes, an Englishman (*c.* 1170–1200), and his claims, though often attacked of late, have never been disproved.

The qualities and charms of the best of these Romances were almost entirely new in literature, though there had been attempts at something like them in Greek from the fourth century onward. These attempts, however, entirely lacked the element called "chivalry," itself a combination of religious and definitely Christian devotion, of mysticism, and of a sometimes almost fantastic, but always passionate and never merely

Its literary character.

[1] This word originally means only something written in "romance" (French) language, but owing to the popularity of the *story*, religious or profane, was later transferred and restricted to that. See Glossary.

sensual, devotion to womankind. This chivalry—which included, or rather inspired, desperate valour and a reckless quest of adventure—displays itself in a fashion which some think monotonous, but others by no means so, in a very large number of stories. We have something like a hundred in English from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century—all, until quite the later date, in verse. But the qualities of all, and the subjects of some, are absorbed and (except the actual versification) represented. in the great *Morte d'Arthur* of Sir Thomas Malory (see below).

**English examples.** In the case of almost all these (the chief exception being *Gawain and the Green Knight*) we have French originals—indeed it is hardly an exaggeration to say that French, as a literature, supplied such originals to the whole of Europe. But these were, in the circumstances of language above described, written in some cases certainly, in others probably, in England and by Englishmen. Moreover, our English romances themselves are by no means mere translations; they do not even regularly or usually keep the metrical form of their originals, and the spirit is often quite different. The English romance is not only the direct ancestor of the English novel, but it represents, as nothing else does, the breaking out of the rather sober and limited stem of Old English literature into bud and leaf and flower and fruit with infinite variety of delight. The whole of this volume could be easily filled with by no means full abstracts of the stories told in these romances; indeed the whole of it would hardly hold such an abstract of the Arthurian cycle by itself. That has been made known in modern English by many writers, from Tennyson downwards; and it is certainly the greatest of all. But only a very few of the others are really poor stories; and though no great poetry is to be found in them,

many, if not most, are told in lively enough verse. The "stock subjects" of Romance have been sometimes complained of; but in most cases the complaint is really an excuse for not taking the trouble to read them. The fine but not mawkish legend-moral of the already mentioned *Gawain and the Green Knight*, with the hero's resistance in the main, but in part surrender to the combined temptation of a lady's blandishments and a talisman to preserve him in fight; the adventures of Gawain's cousin Sir Yvain and a guardian lion; the numerous variations on the story of the knight who changes his arms during a tournament to avoid recognition; others on the misdeeds of a wicked steward or seneschal; the great love-legend (inferior to that of Lancelot and Guinevere, but possibly its suggester) of Tristram and Iseult; the touching religious allegories or half-allegories of *Sir Amadas* (not Amad*is*) and *Sir Isumbras* (the latter the subject of a famous picture by Millais); the early, vigorous, and perhaps originally English adventures of *Havelok* and *Horn*; endless minor tales of Sir Gawain and other Knights of the Round Table, not directly connected with the main Arthurian story; not a few English versions of the Charlemagne and the classical romances above-mentioned; the *Seven Sages*, a cluster of stories in a common framework which has a voluminous ancestry in Hebrew, Persian, other Eastern languages, and Greek; the beautiful half-Eastern love-stories of *Florice and Blanchefleur* and of *Parthenopaeus* and his fairy mistress Melior; that of the other fairy, *Melusine*, closely connected with the English-Angevin royal house; the almost more unhistorical but very spirited romancing of the deeds of the Angevin hero, Richard Cœur de Lion; the famous histories of local heroes, *Guy of Warwick* and *Bevis of Hampton*, may be selected from others far too many to mention. There

was a time when, out of ignorance and conventionality, "as dull as a romance of chivalry" was a stock comparison of reproach. This has long been wiped away; and there are some now who would say, "Give me any novel that is not duller than the dullest romance of chivalry itself, and it will do."

In some of these Romances there is visible—perhaps for the first time—a curious reaction or backwater in the general progress of English verse. Some authorities think that the old alliterative-accentual form never ceased out of the land, and that it is only by accident that we have nothing left of importance in it, save the broken attempts of Layamon, for some 300 years. If so, the accident is an odd one; and in any case it is useless to speak of what does not exist. But, at an uncertain time, guessed at as a little before the middle of the fourteenth century,[1] such verse does reappear, in some romances, in one or two religious poems, etc. And after culminating in the great poem of *The Vision of Piers Plowman* (see below), it continues, though in a straggling and unprogressive fashion, till the beginning of the sixteenth. When, however, we compare it with the real O.E. originals certain marked differences are seen—differences which tell the same story as the new metrical poetry itself. The old poetry had, as has been said, a strong *trochaic* (–⏑) cadence about it; the new has an almost equally strong iambic-anapaestic (⏑– or ⏑⏑–) tendency. The old never rhymed; the new often com-

The alliterative revival.

Hampole.

[1] Some have been inclined to associate the revival with the remarkable *religious* movement introduced in the northern counties by Richard Rolle of Hampole (*d.* 1349) But his chief work, *The Prick of Conscience*, is in *metre* (octosyllables with occasional decasyllabic extension), and though there is much alliteration in some of the beautiful religious lyrics attributed to him they also are regularly metrical. There is, however, a peculiar charm about these, and about some of the new alliterative poems not attributed to Hampole himself, which seems to be possibly due to some common influence.

bines rhyme with accent and alliteration, and sometimes achieves (as in the beautiful *Pearl* poem) quite complicated stanzas. Finally, the old alliteration was more or less strictly regulated; the new is extremely casual, being sometimes exaggerated and sometimes almost neglected, though oftenest the former.

The third principal direction (see above, p. 21) in which a new departure was taken by English in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century was Lyric. The absence, and the reason of the absence, of this in Old English have been pointed out above. Variety of metre is what Lyric requires first of all; and it is scarcely too much to say that the love-motive is what is required next. Moreover, as lyric is essentially a vehicle of personal sentiment and personal observation, many more matters come within the range of poetical expression. One well-known piece, "Sumer is ycumen in," and perhaps others, date from the thirteenth, while from the early fourteenth we have a charming collection in a single MS., where the proximity of English, French, and Latin examples shows us the patterns which English artists had before them, and the way in which they utilised these patterns, as well as the fact that (despite Orm's anticipation) Ascham's famous resolve (see above, p. 18, and below, p. 62) to write "English matters in the English tongue for English men" was still a long way off, even in poetry. "Alisoun" and "Lenten is come with love to toun" forecast the supreme excellence which English was to attain in this department. Now, too, the great ballad-metre or "common-measure" finds almost its first example[1] in the religious song of *Judas*. In short, the material of Middle English—made more plastic

Lyric.

[1] It had, of course, existed *originally* in the fourteener couplets (14.14 = 8.6 8 6), but it had not been definitely moulded into quatrain form

in substance and variegated in colour by the admixture of the Romance element—is moulded and twisted by newly educated fingers into all sorts of delightful forms.

The advance in prose was naturally slower. Prose, even in direct natural development, is, as has been said, almost always later than verse; its forms are far less easily transferred from one language to another; and lastly, there was, until the late twelfth century at any rate, very little prose of any kind in French to serve as pattern. It is not till nearly the close of the fourteenth that we get notable examples of it in English; and then they are comparatively so few and so much of the nature of mere translation that it has been the fashion to give them even less attention than they deserve. But the fourteenth century itself added very largely to the three divisions just noticed, saw beyond all doubt the addition to them of drama,[1] and in its later half contributed, for the first time,[2] three great individual writers to English Literature.

The fourteenth century.

Prose and drama

The appearance of great individual writers

These three are William Langland, whose birth-date is quite unknown, and whose identity as a single person has been questioned, but who may be taken as about contemporary with the next named; John Gower, who may have been born as early as 1325; and Geoffrey Chaucer, whose birth is put, by argument rather than positive information, about fifteen years later. All must have been dead soon after the close of the century; Chaucer almost certainly died in its concluding year.

There is, though it has been much debated, little real importance, for students beginning the subject, in the

[1] The exact dates of this are, however, so uncertain that account of it will be best postponed to the next chapter.

[2] For Cynewulf (see above, p. 7-8) is only a guessed *person*; and even the parallel guesswork which has assigned some of the romances and some of the alliterative poems just mentioned in groups to individual authors, has been able to give these phantoms neither name nor date.

question whether we can make out any autobiographical details in the singular but really great poem called *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Plowman*, with Langland. which there is now generally connected a briefer and more practical piece on the shortcomings of Richard II., to which the name of *Richard the Redeless* ("incapable of taking counsel") has been given. There is still less importance for such students in the recent attempts to "split up" the authorship, though perhaps they should be made aware of the fact that such attempts have been made. It should be sufficient for such students, and perhaps not only for them, that most of the best critics see no evidence of more than one hand in the main work, though that hand may have rehandled it more than once, and though in the great number of MSS. (more than fifty) there may be interpolations. "William Langland" (they should also remember) is a very shadowy and not quite certain person. But the poem itself is the thing, and a very remarkable thing it is—written in the new-old alliterative manner above noticed, and giving the best examples of that manner, though showing also its limitations and its defects. The subject is (like that of a large if not the larger proportion of the poems of the time) an allegory, or rather a succession of allegories which melt into, or more abruptly replace, each other in the exact "kaleidoscopic" fashion of the dreams or visions which they represent. The poem is at once political, religious, and social in character, dealing with the misrule and corruptions of Edward the Third's later years and the economical disturbance introduced by the French wars, and still more by the disbanded soldiery after the Peace of Bretigny, as well as by the Black Death (1349–62–69). It is also largely concerned with the ecclesiastical unrest, including Lollardism, though Langland is not a Lollard,

far as he goes in what would later be called a Puritan direction. *Three* main stages or versions of the poem, A, B, and C, were disentangled by the industry of the late Professor Skeat; and the division is never likely to be much disturbed. A, the shortest and evidently the earliest, is mainly political in its allegory and moral; B, the central version, adds a great deal of moral and more directly religious matter; and C continues the development in the allegorical and mystical direction. Some passages in the poem have become almost famous—the opening dream on Malvern Hills, with the vision of the World, and the Church, and Heaven, and Hell; the keen political satire of the marriage of "Meed" ("reward" in the good sense, "corruption" in the bad), and the journey to Court and the scenes there; the earliest English version of the "Bell-the-Cat" fable; the (then common) sketches of the Seven Deadly Sins, with vivid pictures of low London life; the allegorical figures of Piers Plowman (first the just man, and lastly Christ Himself), "Imaginatyf" ("human wisdom"), Hawkyn the Active Man (the ordinary human being), and others; the splendid description of Christ's Descent into Hell, and many more.

*The Vision of Piers Plowman.*

The poem, especially if the reader concentrates his attention upon one version, is not very difficult to *read* as far as language goes—in fact it is quite an error to suppose that Langland has a more archaic diction than Chaucer. But the peculiar nature of its subjects, and its treatment of them, make it rather difficult to *follow*. This difficulty, however, can be easily surmounted, especially with the help of side-headings or a running abstract; and then the reader will have at his command some of the greatest poetry in English before the sixteenth century—stuff worthy to rank in power and majesty, though not in sweetness, variety, or volume, with the best of Chaucer.

Not much of such great poetry is to be found in the far more varied and voluminous (unfortunately also the much more verbose) work of Gower. An extremely fine passage (no doubt based on Ovid), describing the enchantments of Medea, and one or two others, reach or approach greatness; but not much else. Gower, however, has literary interests of no unimportant kind. In the first place, he is the great and almost the last example of the "trilingual" peculiarity, which had done so much for English, and having done it, was now to cease. He seems to have written with equal facility in English, French, and Latin, and of his four principal works one, the chief and best known, *Confessio Amantis*, is English; one, *Speculum Meditantis*, French; and two, *Vox Clamantis* and the *Tripartite Chronicle*, in Latin. With the three last we have nothing to do here. The *Confessio*, a very long poem in octosyllabic couplets of a type closely but not slavishly following the French, has been rather variously judged. It is a collection of stories from ancient and recent literature, both sacred and profane, enshrined or embodied in an extensive allegorical framework (not too appropriate to the modern eye), wherein the poet confesses to Venus' Confessor, and is at the last dismissed from her service, as superannuated, by the goddess. In this framework there are but few traces of the humour, and absolutely nothing of the liveliness and varied character-touches which Chaucer would have put in. Gower's style is facile, voluble, and insignificant; and except in rare instances his versification deserves very much the same description. But though he has nothing like the genius of either of his two contemporaries, and nothing like the variety of Chaucer, he shows in his own way, and within his limits, to a not much less degree than they do, the increasing mastery of the language as a literary instrument. And there is very

**Gower.**

**The *Confessio Amantis*.**

little doubt that his great collection of stories, though not in the least original, served to convey their story-subjects to some of the greatest English writers. Among them figure many of the best classical myths, some of the most interesting romance-themes, biblical narratives, Eastern tales from profane sources, the former subject of *Apollonius of Tyre* and the future one of *Pericles*; including more than one which Chaucer (at one time an intimate friend of Gower's) seems to have borrowed.

**Chaucer.**

But Chaucer himself—save in the one point of intensity or sublimity as compared with Langland—far exceeds these two contemporaries of his. To start English Literature with him—as used to be done—is indeed a grave and almost fatal mistake; to regard him as, wholly or mostly unconnected with his English predecessors, and as wholly or almost wholly a copyist of French and Italian, is a mistake nearly as grave, and not much less fatal.

**His general character and earlier work.**

What Chaucer really did was (in a phrase of Tennyson's altered in application) to "catch up and utter the sum" of the accomplishment of Middle English before his time, to add something of foreign example sometimes greatly improved in form, and to infuse both with very much more of native and individual genius, applied, in the case of form and spirit alike, to a vastly enlarged range of subjects. In doing this he displays a tone and temper not indeed "universal" like Shakespeare's, but covering an unusually wide range. Beginning (to accept the most probable and best supported theories on the subject) with actual, though very free and original, translation from the French of the famous *Romance of the Rose*,[1] and passing

[1] This, the work of two French poets, William of Lorris and John of Meung, with a considerable interval between them but within the thirteenth century, is a love-allegory complicated by its second author with much other matter. Its influence on the two following centuries was immense.

through a stage of imitation to some extent of the same literature in other works, he then, in consequence apparently of actual visits to Italy, betook himself to the study of its younger but at the time greater literature in the work of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. This produced perhaps *The House of Fame*, an unfinished allegory full of humour, certainly the extremely fine romance of *Troilus and Creseyde*, a surprising example, at such an early date, of character-drawing and conception of society, containing also much fine poetry; the *Legend of Good Women*, most interesting in its prologue; and finally the greatest of his works (again unfinished), the *Canterbury Tales*. The plan of these, a series of unconnected stories enclosed in a continuous framework (in this case the history of the journey of some pilgrims to Canterbury), may have been taken from Boccaccio's *Decameron* or from the *Seven Sages* (above noticed); the separate subjects are mostly traceable to this or that earlier text in one or other of the three languages. But Chaucer, as Shakespeare was to do after him, handles all his borrowings in such an original fashion that their exact origin and amount become questions of mere curiosity. He adds a great deal in actual bulk;[1] he intersperses passages of humour, shrewd wit, and pure poetry to which there are no parallels in the originals; and, above all, he manages to infuse that perception and grasp of character in which is the great glory of modern, and especially of English literature. Owing to the changes in education, a very much larger number of persons than was the case formerly, know the *Prologue* to the *Tales*, which contains sketches in this kind of writing hardly surpassed as far as they go. But the whole book has to be read in order

*The Canterbury Tales*

[1] For instance, *Troilus and Creseyde* contains more than 8000 lines, of which less than 3000 can be traced to originals in Boccaccio.

to see how cunningly Chaucer makes the speech, subjects, views of his personages work out the descriptions or, as it were, elaborate labels—like those attached to the *dramatis personae* of some plays—which he has given in the Prologue.

This command of character-drawing—always humorous, sometimes brilliantly witty, not seldom pathetic, and romantic in all but the highest degree—is Chaucer's greatest possession, together with the almost inseparable power of "telling a story" which accompanies it. But for the student as distinguished from the mere reader for pastime, the enormous advances which he enabled English to take in matters of pure literature—in diction, in versification, in arrangement of verse-forms, and last, but by no means least, in furtherance of prose-writing—are the principal considerations. To this day, these advances are a wonder; and they can only be reasonably explained or opened by a key which is in reality the key of all literary history. These things show themselves in one man; but they are, only with considerable allowance, that man's work. They are in reality the work of all his predecessors in the particular stage of which he is the final and the complete representative, though he contributes to his representation a finer gift, a wider knowledge, and a more extensive and accurate craftsmanship than any one before him, or any one of his own contemporaries, has possessed.

**Great advance of literary character in them.**

It is important, however, to give more particular account of the different respects in which this advance was effected. Chaucer's own contemporaries, who praised his "gold dew-drops" of speech, and his successors down to the greatest of them, Spenser, whose description of his master as a "well of English undefiled" has been sometimes misunderstood—all these seem to have considered his diction as his most remarkable

**Account of this in detail**

**Chaucer's diction.**

quality. There was, indeed, much to be said for this. Far as Chaucer is from being what Tennyson (with a pardonable because poetical exaggeration) called him, "the *first* warbler," he is the first warbler who is quite certain of his notes. The precision, the variety, and the beauty of his language are all quite marvellous. A short and easy way of sampling, though of course not of exhausting, them is to read first the description of the Prioress, with all its minute detail and good-natured satire, in the *Prologue*, and then the *Prioress's* own *Tale*, with its pictorial and narrative power, its exquisite pathos and piety, kept utterly clear of sentimentality and cant. After these the student should turn to the stately splendour of the description of the combats, of the temples, and of the prayers in the *Knight's Tale*. To produce effects like these, the most complete mastery of language is required; and Chaucer has it. His own praise of Dante, "not one word will he fail," is absolutely true of himself. It is exactly what we do not find in any writer before him, and hardly in any after him till Spenser. He does sometimes condescend to the catchwords and commonplaces which form one of the greatest drawbacks to mediaeval writing; but he does this seldom, and, like Shakespeare in parallel case, not because he cannot avoid them, but because, at the moment, he does not choose to avoid them.

**His versification.**

The other great point of versification was no doubt equally admired; but, owing to circumstances which will be dealt with later, it was much less well understood. For some one hundred and twenty years people tried to write verse like Chaucer's, and showed only that they did not understand his ways. For another sixty or seventy they wrote better in practice, but quite misunderstood him in theory; and it is a question whether anybody except Spenser really (and whether even Spenser fully)

understood his verse till in 1775, nearly four hundred years after his own death, Thomas Tyrwhitt (1730–1786) found out most if not all of the secret.[1]

Chaucer's versification is in fact a reduction or promotion to perfect practice of the processes of blending Teutonic and Romance usages in the matter. Whether he had a thorough theoretical understanding of these processes in his own case is very doubtful: some very great and much later poets, such as Coleridge, have not had that. But some remarks of his own show us that he had—what all great poets, for instance Wordsworth and Matthew Arnold, have *not* had—an instinctive sense of what is not good metre, and an instinctive power of avoiding it. All that we have seen groped at in earlier Middle English is here actually accomplished. His works are almost entirely composed of arrangements in couplet of the octosyllable and decasyllable; and in more complicated forms of the latter only. He probably had models for all of them in French: he certainly had predecessors for the most important of them, the octosyllabic and decasyllabic couplets, in English. But everything that he touches becomes new. Far more than Gower, he breaks away from the moulds of the French octosyllabic couplet. His beautiful rhyme-royal (see Glossary) has a character, or rather a variety of characters, utterly different from the few examples of the form existing in that language—there are none in English—before him. But above all, his decasyllabic couplets are his great work; and the attempts to trace the secrets of their versification to French show a complete absence of ear. It was not indeed necessary that he should go to France at all, and he had not many examples there of

[1] That is to say, the fact that in many cases the final *e* of words, not now existing or not pronounced in them, was counted as a syllable.

the couplet, though the decasyllable in other forms had been largely used in French. But his uses of the trisyllabic foot (which can only be got rid of by the most extravagantly arbitrary and unnatural devices) of the Alexandrine (which is not quite so necessary, but which almost certainly exists), and above all of the mechanism of pause and overlapping which sometimes leaves the couplets separate and sometimes welds them into a larger whole—all these things have no place in French whatever. It is Chaucer who evolves them from the spirit and practice of English in immemorial ages, and who establishes them in that spirit and practice for all time to come.

**His prose.**

His work in prose is of course much less striking, but it is greater than some have thought. Middle English, as we have seen, was very slow to produce really good prose, and what there was till after Chaucer's time was almost wholly translation. His own work pretty certainly was. It includes two Canterbury tales. The first is a moral one, *The Tale of Melibee*, which is unfortunately very dull, but contains some exceedingly interesting blank-verse passages, interspersed, it would seem, unconsciously, and probably resulting from the poet's great practice in verse elsewhere, but showing how the form (which did not make its appearance *as* verse for more than a century later) naturally obtrudes itself when attention is paid to prose-writing. *The Parson's Tale*, as its title shows, is theological and follows more than one French and Latin original; but its conclusion (if genuine) is a curious review of the poet's own works. Then there is a scientific treatise on the Astrolabe, an astronomical instrument then much used, with a pleasant introduction to "Little Lewis my son"; and, most interesting of all, a version of Boethius to compare with Alfred's.

In all these Chaucer's powers of innovation and re-formation are hardly less noticeable than in his verse; but the time had not come for actual performance of equal value.

The Library in 1400.

It will have been seen from the foregoing chapter how greatly the "English Library" has been enlarged since we surveyed it at the close of the A.S. period; and in summarising the additions we may add a few particulars—warning the student carefully that Chaucer, for instance, would in all probability not have been able to read a line of A.S. itself. But though nobody may have been in a position to compare or combine the two divisions of the national collection, the richness of the new bookcase (as we may call it) is undeniable. Until quite the close of the period the additions are chiefly in verse, but the volume and variety of these has been only too imperfectly sketched above. It is impossible to exaggerate the value of the great mass of Romance now available, whether from the side of mere æsthetic pleasure and education, or from that of ethical development—for the "chivalric" ideal is one of the highest ever reached by humanity. At the close of the period Wyclif and his followers made the Scriptures far more accessible in the vernacular than they had been; and much earlier Scripture history, combined and "romanced" indeed with not a little legend, had been supplied in new and attractive form—the chief example of which is the huge poem called *Cursor Mundi*, "the best book of all," as an enthusiastic reader or copyist has described it in MS. Poetical treatment in English, not mere verse chronicle, of military and other stirring affairs, which had begun as early as the reign of Edward I., had recently been bestowed on the wars of Edward III. in lively ballads by Laurence Minot. Further, the great department of drama had been added to English literature, after being for a time confined to Latin. A dramatised version of the "Harrowing of Hell" (Christ's descent thereto) is supposed to be as old as 1322. And lastly, as has been shown in Chaucer's case, prose, which after all is the only possible literary instrument of all work, was beginning to be taken seriously in hand as such, with remarkable results already. The English reader could once more read English history in business-like English prose (John of Trevisa's free version of Higden's Latin *Polychronicon*), and perhaps a little before, certainly a little after Chaucer's death, the most interesting and

delightful book yet written in that prose appeared in the shape of Sir John Mandeville's *Voyages and Travels*. Whether there ever was such a person as Sir John; whether his book was originally written in Latin or French; whether it is an ingeniously made-up mosaic of previous writers or the record of an actual journey, helping itself (like such records to this day) from previous accounts—all these things would not matter to our book-collector and should not matter to the student for some time to come. Here, beyond all doubt as a fact, is something that this student's ancestor had before him—something that he could delight himself with—in simple, admirably fluent, and natural language—with none of the tricks and temptations of verse. It is true that most of the stories told by Sir John, or the person who took his name, are purely mythical, and that most of them could be, and indeed have been, as for instance by Mr. William Morris, admirably treated in verse. But unfortunately, whatever may have been the case in ancient times, modern men will not read verse as freely as they will read prose, and there is a very large number of subjects, even of fiction, with a much larger of what is called the "serious" kind, which cannot be treated suitably in verse at all. Now, and almost for the first time since the A.S. period, prose was used for other subjects besides religious ones.

So, then, the reader of 1400 had a very considerable library to draw on; and even if he had had nothing but the work of the principal writers of the last half of the preceding century, Chaucer, Gower, Langland, Wyclif's *Bible*, and Mandeville's *Travels*, he would not have been to be pitied. For these works contained not only much in themselves, but also the promise of infinitely more to follow.

# CHAPTER III

## BETWEEN CHAUCER AND SPENSER

Bad reputation of the fifteenth century, explicable but mistaken—Confusions and difficulties of the time—The English "Chaucerians": Lydgate and Occleve—Hawes, Skelton, and Barclay—Ballads, carols, etc.—Early and Middle Scots literature: Barbour, etc.—James I. and others—Henryson and Dunbar—Douglas and Lyndsay—Alexander Scott and Montgomerie—The drama: Mystery and Miracle plays—Moralities—Interludes—Newer poetry: Wyatt and Surrey—Importance of the sonnet, and of Surrey's blank verse—Poets between Surrey and Spenser: Gascoigne—Importance and value of this transition period—Its prose—Malory and the *Morte d'Arthur*—The *Paston Letters*, Fisher, Berners, etc.—Ascham and his friends—The Library about 1577.

Bad reputation of the fifteenth century, explicable but mistaken.

THE division of English literature which intervenes between the death of Chaucer (say 1400) and the appearance of Spenser (say 1580) has often, especially as regards its first three-quarters or a little more (1400–1540), been dismissed as dreary and uninteresting, while even in the last division there has been a tendency, after dwelling slightly on Wyatt and Surrey in the later years of Henry VIII., to hurry with only slightly reduced impatience, if not contempt, to the last half of his daughter's long and glorious reign. One of the chief lessons which students of this book should learn is that such an attitude is always unworthy of the scholar, and in all but the rarest cases does serious practical harm. Literature is a living and continuous organism, and you cannot break it up

and throw away or neglect some of the pieces without mischievous results of misapprehension as regards the other parts and the whole.

If indeed we confine the word "interesting" to its lowest and most popular sense, as designating merely something amusing or exciting as a pastime, there might be some justification for the disfavour in which this period is held. Its hundred and eighty years yield perhaps one single book, Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, which answers to such a description in a perfect degree. Even those who can enjoy poetry as poetry sometimes complain that there is nothing for them here except the work of the two courtly poets above-named. But this last notion (like that of depreciating the value of the Scots poetry, which is one of the most interesting features of the time) is, as will be shown shortly, a mistake of ignorance or indolence, or perhaps of both together. And the absence (after all only comparative) of single books of the first interest is, for any one who will take the trouble to understand its probable causes, actually a source of interest in itself as regards the whole history.

To appreciate the importance of the fifteenth century and of the first two-thirds or three-quarters of the sixteenth we must, as it were, survey it both piecemeal and generally, as well as from more than one point of view. We must see first what it did; then what were the reasons why it did not do more and better; and lastly what, putting aside its own actual achievements, was its preparation for the great creative age that was to follow.

Some glances have already been made, in the last chapter, at the apparently surprising fact that the immense advance made by Chaucer was not immediately—was indeed not for a whole century—followed up. There

were plentiful poets, or at least verse-writers, some of them almost of middle age when Chaucer died, such as John Lydgate (1370?–1451?) and Thomas Occleve (1370?–1450?), with others of less note who followed down to Stephen Hawes (*d.* 1523?), John Skelton (1460?–1529?), and Alexander Barclay (1475–1552). They all admired Chaucer without stint; they endeavoured to copy him in the eagerest and most industrious manner; yet most of them, except the Scottish school to be mentioned presently, only succeeded in producing the most wretched and bungling work, not seldom descending to sheer doggerel. The absence, in southern English during the earlier fifteenth century, of any poet or prose-writer of real genius, with the exception of Malory, will of course account for something, but not for everything. A person of real genius might well have been, and persons not of genius could not but be, hopelessly hampered by the great changes of grammar and pronunciation which were evidently going on about this time. It is a question whether Chaucer himself had not rather arbitrarily "standardised" matters in these respects; it is, for instance, certain that the value of the final *e*, which represents a very large number of older disused inflections, was by no means uniformly recognised in his own later days, and began soon afterwards to fall into greater and ever greater disuse. It is certain also that the choice between English and French accentuation (the former always throwing back, and the latter always tending to the last syllable [1]), which he had exercised with artistic audacity, ceased (though very gradually) to be available for choice, and that in other ways the century was one of half-conscious transition.

[1] Thus in five lines only of the *Prologue* (Character of the Knight) he gives the French "honoùr" to the noun, and the English "hon'our" to the verb.

People were only beginning, and hardly even that, to think of the technical teaching of English grammar, English style, English pronunciation, English versification, while on the other hand they found all these things constantly changing in practice. To understand the literature of this time, one should think of a man treading gingerly on ice which breaks under his feet, or groping in the dark with only fitful gleams of light to guide him; or listening to a broken speech or piece of music, from which he has to extract the melody and the meaning by guess-work. These are not mere fanciful analogies. We know from his own words that at the very middle of the period, Caxton, the printer and translator—who in the latter capacity did no small, and in the former an incalculable, service to English literature—felt exactly like one of the victims just described when Margaret of Burgundy (an English princess) and Lord Rivers bade him translate from French. In French itself he found "a fair language," that is to say, a tolerably settled style of grammar, etc., which enabled people to write vividly and pleasantly. When he tried to produce similar effects in English he found that he did not know how. This was in prose; but in verse it was worse. Sometimes the poets seem to have kept Chaucer before them, counted his syllables, and reproduced the number without caring or being able to allow for the altered pronunciation and accentuation. Sometimes they seem to have attempted to adapt these things to his rhythm, with an equally unfortunate result. Sometimes also it would appear as if all they could keep hold of was the order of the rhymes and the number of lines in the stanza, the lines themselves taking their chance of rhythm and length.

Confusions and difficulties of the time.

Before, however, saying anything more of the general kind concerning the literary character and value of

this period, it will be better to give a short but definite account of the actual literature which it contains. This may be most conveniently divided into four parts—the English Chaucerians and others in verse from Lydgate to Spenser; the Scottish poets, for the late and few prose-writers in "Middle Scots," as it is called, are unimportant; the preparatory stage of revival initiated by Wyatt and Surrey in England, and continuing for about forty years before the appearance of Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* and Lyly's *Euphues* definitely announced the great Elizabethan age; and lastly, the English prose-writers of the whole time.

The English "Chaucerians": Lydgate

The first division itself may be with advantage further divided into three stages—the life-time and work of men who were actually contemporary with Chaucer; the period of the Wars of the Roses, which saw very little literature; and the reign of Henry VII., with the earliest years of that of his son. In the first part two names stand out in all histories, and perhaps no others need receive much attention in a First Book of English Literature. These are Lydgate and Occleve. The work of Lydgate, who was a monk of the great Abbey of St. Edmund's Bury, and is often called "the Monk of Bury," is enormously extensive, and has never yet been printed as a whole. Some individual pieces of it extend to thousands and tens of thousands of verses. They are all strongly tinged with the allegory which, from imitation of the *Romance of the Rose* (see above, p. 32), had become the chief feature of almost all literature that could in any way admit it; but their subjects are fairly various. There are many Saints' Lives, a great compilation after Boccaccio on the *Falls of Princes*, a *Tale of Thebes* suggested by Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, a vast translation-adaptation of a French religious allegory of the "Pilgrimage" kind, which we know best from

Bunyan, and others besides minor poems in a few cases touching on events of the time.

Lydgate was regarded by his contemporaries, and by the next generation or two, as nearly if not quite the equal, not merely of Gower, but of Chaucer, the three being often leashed together: but theirs was not a critical period. He followed Chaucer's chief measures, the octosyllabic and decasyllabic couplets and the rhyme-royal; but could get none of his master's various music out of them, and sometimes broke down altogether, so that there is no comparison even between him and the much inferior "regularity" of Gower. Of Chaucer's other qualities, which made him so great a poet, Lydgate has nothing. He is generally one of the dullest of writers, and the one piece of his which is not dull, *London Lickpenny*, a short but very lively description of the bustle and costliness and sharp practice of the capital, is now denied to him by some who defend him in other ways.

**and Occleve**

Occleve, who seems to have been a personal pupil of Chaucer (as perhaps Lydgate also was), and to whom we owe what is very possibly a direct contemporary portrait of that great poet, wrote less and better, at least less incorrectly from the metrical point of view. But, except an account of his own early freaks and follies, his work also is the reverse of lively. The pair are at their best, and that very rarely, in purely religious verse.

**Hawes, Skelton, and Barclay.**

Both seem to have died about the middle of the century; and after them we have, for nearly a generation, nothing in southern English verse that deserves to be mentioned here, though the first of the three poets, Hawes, Skelton, and Barclay, who specially represent Henry the Seventh's reign, may possibly have known Lydgate. The work of all three is sufficiently different in character. Hawes is a purely moral and allegorical poet, who, though he has flashes of real poetry now and

then, cannot get out of the formal hamper of the time. Skelton (though he also deals in allegory) is a sharp satirist of court ways, and more importantly a rebel in part to the sham Chaucerianism of the day, and an experimenter in a curious form of verse, almost but not quite doggerel, which is called "Skeltonic."[1] This has actual merit when compared with the lumbering rhyme-royal, the slipshod octosyllables, and the decasyllables that do not seem to know what they themselves are, of his predecessors. Barclay is mainly a translator or paraphraser of foreign work in German (the *Ship of Fools*) and Italian (the *Eclogues*), both satirical. Although all the three are to some extent free from the very worst faults of their contemporaries, these faults, which are those of English fifteenth-century verse at large, are still visible in them. They are the constant presence of dull and sometimes quite inapposite allegory; the clumsy handling of versification; the use of a flat and undistinguished diction, which they make only worse by what are called "aureate" phrases, that is to say, gaudy Latinisms; and the general lack of poetical craftsmanship as well as poetical spirit.

**Ballads, carols, etc.**

In strange contrast to this is the fact—undoubted though difficult to give chapter and verse for in particular cases—that this very fifteenth century is the time in which the beautiful old English ballads arose, and the time also of still more beautiful carols, or sheer popular songs, on subjects chiefly sacred but sometimes profane, which for truth of rhythm, sweetness of diction, and natural pathos and passion of feeling hardly yield to the productions of any time, language, or country. It is to these things, no doubt, that we owe the preservation,

[1] Some attempt to derive this from French originals. But these originals have nothing of the specially English use of equivalence and substitution which distinguishes Skelton.

during this comparatively dead time[1] in literary poetry, of the true poetical spirit which, when literature had dragged itself out of the hamper of the transition, was to give us "the melodious bursts that echo still" of the great Elizabethans.

Early and Middle Scots literature: Barbour, etc

The history of early Scottish Literature, which, though not exactly conterminous with the present period, finds its chief and most interesting development therein, is very curious. For a long time (during the whole of the O.E. period and the earlier part of that of M.E.) there was no distinction at all between the language of Northern England and that of Scotland proper; while from the later stage, in consequence probably of the extremely disturbed state of the country, no literature at all came for a long time. It has indeed been questioned whether such a term as "*Old* Scots" has any proper designation. If it has, we have hardly any literature certainly belonging to it except the *Brus* and perhaps some other work of John Barbour (1316?–1395), Archdeacon of Aberdeen, who was a rather older contemporary of Chaucer. Some indeed have identified a certain Huchowne, mentioned by Wyntoun the chronicler, with the author of some alliterative poems in northern English; but there is no real evidence of this, and it is not even certain that Huchowne was a Scotsman. Barbour's own work is interesting and of considerable merit, showing good knowledge both of French and English poetry; and its octosyllabic couplets form a spirited and agreeable medium for telling the

[1] The student may find, in some books, a sharp distinction made and insisted upon between this literary or "Court" poetry on the one hand, and "Folk" or popular verse on the other, not merely at this time but earlier. Whatever may be the case in other literatures, it is not wise to lay too much stress on this in English, where, most fortunately, the two kinds have at almost all times intermixed with and influenced each other.

striking stories (not perhaps always strictly historical) of Robert Bruce's adventures.

It was not, however, till the next century that the remarkable literary dialect known as Middle Scots came into existence; and produced, or was used by, a succession of really remarkable poets, though it was far less productive in prose. What makes this dialect so specially interesting is that it is an artificial or "made" one, arising from the study of Chaucer in the first place, and probably at no time corresponding exactly with anything spoken by the people of Scotland. It found, however, some poets of greater capacity than any of their English contemporaries ready to use it; and it displayed, again in almost glaring contrast to the southern form, that "correctness" of verse, grammar, and the like which is almost a necessity to artificially made languages. It continued to be written, though with decreasing volume and merit, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; and its last considerable exponent, Alexander Montgomerie (1556?–1610?), probably did not die much before Shakespeare. But, even before the Union of the Crowns in 1603, something befell it not quite unlike the fate of A.S. five hundred years earlier; and when that Union happened, the effect was much more directly fatal than that of the Norman Conquest in the other case. Like all artificial things, it had no seed of life in it; and the dialect of Montgomerie was a mere traditional imitation, a century or so older than its actual date. Scottish verse-writers—Drummond, Aytoun, Stirling, Hannay, and others—began to use ordinary English and to copy English poets; and during the seventeenth century there is hardly a Scots poet of merit; while the best Scottish prose-writers, such as Sir Thomas Urquhart and Sir George Mackenzie, are not pure Scots in their diction.

But during the time of this chapter, and of the first part of the next, this hybrid, imitative, artificial speech, or rather writing, supplied a remarkable succession of poets. James the First of Scotland (1394–1437), not long after Chaucer's death, appears, in the judgment of most though not all critics, to have written an allegorical poem, *The King's Quair* [Book], in direct imitation of Chaucer himself, but with no little sweetness and colour.[1] The chronicler Wyntoun (1350 ?–1420 ?), above-mentioned, uses the octosyllable with more freedom of substitution than Barbour. Henry the Minstrel (more familiarly "Blind Harry") writes at some time in the fifteenth century (his birth- and death-dates are quite unknown), in decasyllables of a rather more French mould than Chaucer's, a spirited though utterly unhistorical account of Wallace, that the earlier hero of the Wars of Independence, on whom Barbour had been silent, might not lack his poet. James I. and others.

Robert Henryson (dates again uncertain) displayed much greater and more varied poetical power than these, in an unusually good and varied collection of poems—*Fables*, a continuation or rather a different ending of Chaucer's *Troilus and Creseyde* which has singular power and pathos, and minor pieces of merit. Later, and at the junction of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, comes William Dunbar (1465 ?–1530 ?), in whom some have seen a writer not too weak to compete with Burns for the position of chief poet in Scots dialect, and who, putting mere comparison aside, possesses indisputable vigour, humour, power of description, passion now and then, and command of good verse always. Dunbar is a Chaucerian still, and affects the heavier and more "aureate" style of the time in such poems as *The Golden* Henryson and Dunbar

[1] The metre, Chaucerian also, is rhyme-royal (see Glossary), a name which is supposed to be derived from this very book.

*Targe* and the *Thistle and the Rose*. But his poetical power is better displayed in some shorter pieces—the very spirited and fairly well-known *Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins*; the coarse but in its opening beautiful *Two Married Women and the Widow*, written in alliterative verse; and perhaps a sort of "Canterbury Tale," *The Friars of Berwick*, which is not much below Chaucer himself in his looser and lighter vein; the solemn *Lament for the Dead Makers* [Poets], and not a few others.

Douglas and Lyndsay.

Slightly younger comes Gavin Douglas (1474 ?–1522), Bishop of Dunkeld and son of Archibald Bell-the-Cat, author of allegorical poems, *King Hart*, the *Palace of Honour*, and (much more importantly) of a famous translation of Virgil with original prologues inserted between the books, sometimes in the most extravagantly alliterated metre, but often showing good poetry, especially in the direction of nature-painting. Him follows another well-known name, Sir David Lyndsay of the Mount (1490 ?–1555), with poems political, personal, and miscellaneous, as well as with a long dramatic composition,[1] *The Satire of the Three Estates*, allegorical in main text and farcical in interludes. From Queen Mary's reign we have, besides anonymous and other singers, Alexander Scott (1525 ?–1584), a poet of whom little if anything is known personally, but the author of some charming lyric. And so we come again to Montgomerie, who ends the list with a fair body of verse, the chief of it sonnets and a very popular allegory, *The Cherry and the Slae* [sloe]. He compares but poorly, though he is a true poet himself, not only with his contemporary Spenser, but with others of the Elizabethans. But with his earlier predecessors the case is quite reversed; and any one who will take the very slight trouble neces-

Alexander Scott and Montgomerie.

[1] This is the only English counterpart of a whole class of Early French plays called by the special name of *sotie*.

sary to master the odd-looking but not really difficult dialect will find in Henryson and Dunbar a spirit and poetical execution which are utterly absent, not merely from Lydgate and from Occleve, but from Hawes and even from Skelton.

The drama. Mystery and Miracle plays.

We have just mentioned what is practically the only drama in Middle Scots; but the establishment of that great kind in southern English is a feature of great importance in the literature of the fifteenth century. There were certainly dramatic compositions earlier; we have mentioned one of a rather rudimentary kind representing Christ's descent into or "Harrowing of" Hell, which is probably as old as the first quarter of the fourteenth, while plays of Scriptural tenor (as all were at first) had been performed in Latin as far back as the twelfth. The exact origin of these performances has been much disputed, and attempts have been made to trace it back to village festivals and the like. Historically, the evidence is much in favour of a gradual development from the services of the Church, assisted perhaps on one side by the dramatic character of popular sports, and on the other by some trace of study of classical dramatists like Terence. All our earlier plays are religious in character and subject, though often with farcical interludes, entirely unscriptural, but connected somehow with the story of the piece. They seem to have been first acted in the church itself; then in the churchyards; and then on stages, sometimes by the guilds or trade-companies. As in other cases there is no doubt some literary indebtedness to French, but our plays are less regularly arranged. The French religious play was divided into "Mysteries," dealing with Scripture, and "Miracles," dealing with the Virgin and the Saints; but both terms are applied indiscriminately in English. We have four great collections of these plays, besides

minor ones and a few individual pieces. One, and perhaps the oldest, the "York" collection, looks very like a dramatisation of the *Cursor Mundi* (see above, p. 38) divided into short acts, rather than plays, of a few hundred lines each for the separate stories, and each intended to be acted by a special trade guild. Important towns seem to have employed playwrights to make them special versions of sacred story: besides the York, we have others connected with Chester, Coventry, and Wakefield. Unlike the French plays, which are almost invariably in octosyllabic couplet with a few *triolets* (see Glossary) interspersed, the English are in a vast variety of verses, including even the "Burns" stanza, and must have had a great effect in familiarising the English ear with complicated metres. From the simple Scripture history or Saint's Life, however, there proceeded, as time went on, some striking variations. On the one hand, the overmastering allegorical tendency, which has been so often mentioned, and of which the fifteenth century is the great period, seized on the drama

**Moralities.** and produced "Moralities"—plays in which the characters or most of them were abstract—Virtues, Vices, etc.—and which, with a few exceptions, are terribly dull. On the other hand, the farcical episodes above spoken of (which are in some cases almost independent farces, as in a long story of sheep-stealing introduced into the handling of the Epiphany in the Wakefield or "Towneley" Plays) developed themselves into a

**Interludes.** kind of drama called the Interlude (see Glossary), with us in fact an incipient comedy of the ruder and slighter kind. Some of the Saints' Lives, especially that of St. Mary Magdalene, developed in like fashion into elaborate dramas, with change of scene and abundant incident. It was undoubtedly from these various kinds, and not directly and solely from the study of the classics in

the so-called "Renaissance" (see Glossary), that the Elizabethan drama, as we call it, came; though no doubt the classical studies helped. But they were not absolutely needed; and, if used alone, could not have produced some of the most noteworthy features of our great dramatic period. Mixture of comedy and tragedy; rapid change of scene; variety and number of characters; and comparative indifference to a well-concocted and rather limited plot, are directly opposed to the spirit and practice of the ancient drama: they are all of the very essence of the mediaeval, as they are of that which Shakespeare perfected.

Newer poetry: Wyatt and Surrey.

But (though these plays were in verse, and sometimes not bad verse) we must come to Wyatt and Surrey, the two names which, in the blunter outlines of the History of English Literature once current, used to follow Chaucer's almost directly, and with little to follow *them* until Spenser. Biographical detail is here impossible; it must be sufficient to say that Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503–1542) represents the middle period of Henry the Eighth's reign before the "Terror" of its close; and that Henry Howard, by courtesy Earl of Surrey (1517?–1547), was almost the last victim of that Terror itself. They stand also thus near to each other not merely in chronology, but in the direct relation of master and pupil; though Surrey did a good deal of work of a probably independent kind, and of a much more advanced character than Wyatt's. Both represent—with what additional assistance from the contemporary Frenchmen who were influenced in the same manner it is impossible here to discuss—a new influence, that of Italian, on English poetry. Chaucer, as has been said, had derived much from Italian in point of subject; yet he had not been much affected by its form or even by its spirit. But Italian since his time, though it had produced no

single writers equal to the three whom he knew, had continued to perfect itself in general literary expression, and was far ahead of French; while, by following Petrarch chiefly, it had developed a passionate kind of personal poetry which was also not elsewhere to be found. The critical exactness which the Italians had first adopted from the Provençal school,[1] and had afterwards confirmed by the revived Renaissance study of the classics themselves—an exactness which finds expression in the first important critical book of the modern literatures, Dante's *De Vulgari Eloquio*—had evolved divers short forms of verse, the *canzone*, the *sestina*, the madrigal, and above all the sonnet, mainly devoted to love poetry. These, though formally strict, were not so arbitrarily tricked as the kindred French forms above noticed.

Importance of the sonnet.

Of these the Sonnet—a poem, in its strictest kind, of fourteen lines, with the rhymes differently but always more or less intricately arranged—though not the longest or most elaborate, was the most universally popular, and it so happened that its almost unavoidable peculiarities gave exactly what was needed to reform English poetry. That poetry had suffered, as we have partly seen, from the omnipresence of dull and undistinguished allegory, from extreme diffuseness of handling, and from a most ungraceful, if not positively disgraceful, laxity of form. The want of bulk, the hardness of form-outline, and the almost necessary presence of real or assumed personal emotion in the sonnet, though they could not in all cases absolutely keep out these bad things, did so in some, and rendered them conspicuously ugly in all. Wyatt and Surrey both tried the sonnet, and it is most

[1] The poets of the south and south-west of France, especially from the eleventh to the end of the thirteenth century. They were remarkable for the exactness and varied form of their lyrics.

curious to observe how difficult they (and specially Wyatt, the elder and first experimenter) found it to adjust the rhythm of the lines properly. Still they do manage it with only occasional lapses; and they try other metres for short poems with great success. Wyatt also makes efforts at the famous Italian *terza rima*, the metre of Dante (see Glossary). This, for some reason, is a very difficult metre in English, and has seldom been completely successful, even in the hands of such a poet as Shelley.

Keeping closer to older English ways, but reducing these also to greater regularity, both Wyatt and Surrey adopt a variation of the old fourteener-couplet or ballad-measure, to which the curious name of "poulter[er]s measure" was given at the time (see Glossary). But next to the sonnet, and of more importance even than the sonnet, was an experiment which only Surrey made, and which resulted in the momentous, the epoch-making discovery of the powers of English "blank" verse.

When we think of Shakespeare and Milton—even without adding the other great poets from Marlowe to Tennyson who have used the metre—we may be tempted to call this the greatest single step ever taken in the history of English verse. Surrey, who tried it in a translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Books II. and IV., and who for more than a generation was hardly followed at all, probably took this idea also from the Italians, especially from the poet Alamanni. But he need not quite necessarily have done so. Chaucer, always popular since his death, was specially popular at this particular time,[1] and an ear like Surrey's may very well have been caught by the strange blank verses, embedded in prose, which, as has been said, occur frequently, and sometimes in batches, in the *Tale of Melibee*. There was also, under

**and of Surrey's blank verse.**

[1] The first collected edition of Chaucer's *Works* appeared in 1532.

the influence of the classical Renaissance, a distaste—absolutely wrong, but fashionable for a time—for rhyme as a barbarous thing, the product of the Dark Ages. But however it came about, it did come about.

Naturally these first blank verses are a little stiff and awkward, as if the writer were uncertain of his way. There is a tendency (which was hardly got over till Shakespeare conquered it) to make every line come to an end in rhythm if not also in sense—to be, as it has been called, "end-stopped" or "single-moulded," and so to compose a monotonous series of disconnected utterances. But still there it was; and before many years had passed the advantages of it for drama, where rhyme is always an intruder, were discovered by Thomas Sackville (1536–1608), and those for satire by George Gascoigne (1525–1577). Somewhat strangely, though Surrey's own pattern-piece was a considerable part of an epic poem, it was more than a hundred years before Milton showed what the measure could do in that way. But, once more, there it was; and if any one will, enlarging the thought suggested above, think what English poetry would be without its blank-verse poems, he will feel that he can hardly pay too much homage and thanks to Henry Howard, whose life his namesake King cut off on a charge equally frivolous and tyrannical, when he had barely reached his thirtieth year.

Poets between Surrey and Spenser: Gascoigne.

It may seem surprising that, after so decided and promising a revolution as that effected by Wyatt and Surrey, both of whom were, moreover, not merely good craftsmen but real poets, a more definite and general improvement should not have shown itself in English poetry at once. But this would be to mistake the processes of literary evolution, which cannot be too soon understood. When great and general changes seem to follow the work of one or two men it is because

these men are the first to express something that had been long maturing. That was not the case with Wyatt and Surrey. They were really innovators, and their own uncertainty about points of metre, rhythm, and accentuation shows that they were so. It is not therefore surprising, especially if one takes into consideration the religious troubles of the time and the continued failure of great personal capacities, that it should have taken more than thirty years from Surrey's death, more than twenty from the actual printing (they had been known in MS. long before) of the poems of both in *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557), before Spenser appeared, and that there should have been hardly anything of really great poetical merit between, except Sackville's two short pieces, the *Induction* and the *Complaint of Buckingham*, in the curious, and, for advanced students, extremely instructive, but for the mere reader terribly uninteresting *Mirror for Magistrates*.[1] But the time was not really lost, and to think it so is one of the numerous old errors about this subject which have not even yet been completely corrected.

In particular, there is to be found, not merely in the positively good work of Sackville himself, but in the less attractive verse of Tusser, Turberville, Googe, Gascoigne, and others, one point of great importance. They never slip back into the floundering doggerel of the fifteenth century in practice, and in the critical discussions of poetry which at last make their appearance, we can see that this abstinence was deliberate, and that it is even leading some of them into a contrary mistake. Gascoigne, in a little book of *Notes and Instructions*, which is our first regular English treatise on poetics,

**Importance and value of this transition period.**

[1] A great collection, by various hands, of tragical stories in verse from fabulous and real British and English history, which appeared in constantly enlarged editions from 1559 to 1610.

says, though he regrets it, that we have in English only one foot, the iambic. This is quite wrong, and it is contradicted by the practice of his own time; but it was evidently an established idea with professional verse-writers. And though it impoverishes English poetry terribly, and was soon absolutely disregarded, in a fashion which ought to have destroyed it, by Shakespeare himself, every one must see that the prevalence of the notion must have had one good effect—to kill the doggerel and to implant a definite if too restricted sense of rhythm in the English ear. Now as pronunciation was even yet not settled, and as no poet of genius enough to take liberties had yet appeared, this regular if rather schoolboy versification was the best exercise and preparation possible.[1] It was in fact the final benefit which this much abused and too often misunderstood period of 1400–1580 conferred upon English literature, and it more than made up for the mischief of the earlier doggerel from which it was a reaction. *That* never recurred, in the same form at least: *this* helped make its recurrence (at least in the same form) impossible, though we shall see fresh attacks of the disease and fresh applications of the remedy later.

Indeed, properly regarded, the whole period shares this importance as the school-time of modern English verse. The splendid achievement of Chaucer remained as an achievement, remains till the present day, and will always remain. But as a pattern, except for men of genius who could disregard the merely contemporary element in it, it had ceased to be possible, owing to the double change in the vocabulary of the language and in the manner of pronouncing and valuing it. Yet the century which followed, poor as it was in

[1] Especially as the ballads and popular songs kept the freer rhythm going.

poets, gave the vocabulary time to fill up, and the pronunciation time to settle; and the half-century of reforming experiment which came next, prepared the way for Spenser and his school. It may be taken as a paradox, but is a sober truth, that it was really a blessing that we had no good poets in Southern English during the fifteenth century. They could not, like Chaucer, have summed up the past, for he had done it already; and they were losing hold of it. The present was slipping and crumbling under them. They could not have anticipated the future, for the necessary instrument of language was not ready for them. They could only have given the sanction of their poetical spirit, if they had had it, to constantly shifting and dissolving diction and form.

In the apparently more humdrum matter of prose, the record of the period is even better; for there is nothing, even in the earlier time, to apologise for, only a steady progress of schooling and exercising to record, with at least one splendid piece of actual achievement, standing to prose itself very much as Chaucer's does to verse. **Its prose.**

We saw that, by (or very soon after) the beginning of the fifteenth century, most promising beginnings had been made by Chaucer himself, by Trevisa, by Wyclif, and by "Mandeville," in extending the subjects and improving the form of prose. These efforts were continued, during the fifteenth itself, by Capgrave, Fortescue, and others, in the practice of writing on history and the kindred subjects of law and politics in English. A further extension, mistaken in some respects, but symptomatic of the spirit of the time, was made by Reginald Pecock's (1395–1460) resumption of Wyclif's endeavours to make scholastic philosophy and theology English. And not much after the middle of the century we find, almost earlier than anything of the kind in verse, the *deliberate*

attempts of Caxton (1422 ?–1491 ?) to make English cope more easily with "the fair language of French."

Malory and the *Morte d'Arthur*.

Curiously enough, however, the masterpiece above referred to—a masterpiece rather retrospective than prospective—the *Morte d'Arthur*, attributed to Sir Thomas Malory, is one of the books printed by Caxton himself, and we know nothing about its date or author except from the printer, who gives date (1470, printed 1485) and name, but nothing more. It is certain from his other work that Caxton could not have written it himself. In substance it is a prose romance, giving a summary of the extensive and numerous legends about King Arthur in the completest form which those legends had taken, by the combination of the old quasi-historical account of Geoffrey of Monmouth, the Tristram story, the Round Table, the legends of the Grail, and the love of Lancelot and Guinevere, all wrought together into an almost epic unity. Although nearly all its details are substantially found in French or English treatments of the subject earlier, and though "the French book" is quite openly referred to by Malory, no single "French book" which contains the same arrangement is known, or likely to have existed. Nor would it matter much if one were found; for it would not give us the English style of Malory, which is the most perfect of the kind known in any language, and in some places most interestingly analysable as a "prosing" of previous English verse of much inferior quality. So perfect and final is this style that it has had no continuation in English: it has been imitated, but that is all.

Yet although it is the greatest book of the fifteenth century in English, the greatest book in English prose or verse between the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Faerie Queene*, it is, from this very finality and retrospective, not prospective, character, out of the general line of

progress. It is not merely an oasis in the desert (to take the most derogatory view of its period), but one which gives us hardly any notion of the character of the country that we shall reach when that desert is passed.

In this way there was nothing further to be done, for Malory did not even subject English prose of the past to the same discipline which Chaucer had exercised in the case of verse ; and his style, beautiful in itself, was not suited for general purposes—for historical, political, theological, philosophical, scientific, and miscellaneous writing. Nor was that of another very interesting though less beautiful book (or at least collection of writings) contemporary with him, the *Paston Letters*, or correspondence of a Norfolk family of that name during the Wars of the Roses. Even certain translations later than these, made by Lord Berners (1467–1533) from French and Spanish (the most famous of which is a version of the great French chronicler Froissart [1]), were not of very great use for future development, because, once more, the general style was purely mediaeval. But Berners himself in his own original preface-writing, and others, especially Bishop Fisher (1459 ?–1535), another victim of Henry the Eighth's tyranny, and his fellow-sufferer (1478–1535), the still more noted Sir Thomas More,[2] struck into another way of writing, which was also perforce adopted by the new translators of the Bible whom the Reformation raised up (Tyndale, Coverdale, Cranmer), and the compilers (the same

The *Paston Letters*, Fisher, Berners, etc.

[1] Another took for subject a late and rather inferior French romance, *Arthur of Little Britain*, and yet another the much better and, in its earlier forms, older *Huon of Burdeux* (Bordeaux), where we find the first mention of the Fairy king, Oberon. For it was now generally the practice to adapt or re-adapt romance in *prose*.

[2] It is important to remember that More's most famous book, *Utopia*, was written in Latin, and never translated by himself or in his lifetime.

persons in some cases) of the new English *Book of Common Prayer.* The latter necessarily had before them the original Latin, Greek, and Hebrew of their matter; and they, as well as Fisher and More, were not merely, as every educated Englishman had been for centuries, able to write Latin of a sort currently. They were actual and careful students of the classical authors, including those who had dealt scientifically with the languages in the time when they were living—the Latin, and in some cases also the Greek, grammarians and rhetorical writers. From them dates the time when English grammar began to be regularly formulated, and when the devices and crafts whereby Greek and Latin had attained their command of style were applied to English likewise. And in again a slightly younger generation, the chief representatives of which were three members of St. John's College, Cambridge—John, afterwards Sir John, Cheke (1514–57), Thomas Wilson (1525 ?–1517), and above all, Roger Ascham (1515–1568),—extreme pains were taken to adjust English as far as possible to the ordered composition of Latin, and at the same time to purify it from archaisms, foreign and technical terms, and the like. A famous sentence of Ascham's, found in his earliest book on Archery (*Toxophilus*), and referred to above (p. 18) in connection with Orm's earlier sentiment, says that he thought it well to "write this English matter in the English tongue for English men." This may be taken as the motto of the whole school, and though they made some mistakes, as was natural, there is no doubt that from their time dates the regular and progressive development of English prose.

Ascham and his friends.

The Library about 1577.

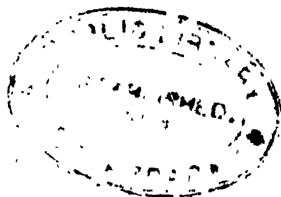
It will be seen from what has been said that what we have called the English Library received, even without taking into account the Scots division, but still more if we

do so,[1] some, if not very many remarkable accessions of single books—the works of Malory, Wyatt, Surrey, and perhaps we may add Sackville—during this period of nearly two centuries, besides a great deal of work valuable for matter. Above all must be ranked, just at its middle, the immense reinforcement given by the new invention of printing, which at once made literary work easier to produce, easier of access to the writer and to the reader, and much less likely to perish by the destruction of single copies.[2] In the later division especially, a great deal of most valuable work, with the earlier translations of the Bible almost at the head, was added to it. But still the period and its work must be regarded, by those who wish to comprehend the course of English literature generally, most of all in that character which has been insisted upon above, that of a time and a body of preparation mainly. Bad experiments and good; clumsy practice as well as artistic or craftsmanlike; the more intelligent study (not mere copying) of foreign languages, ancient and modern—all these went to the same end, and were, in a fashion, the work of individuals. But besides this individual work there were, at least in most of the books written after 1460 or thereabouts, signs of a general progress, natural, and, like all natural things, somewhat mysterious, which was being made by the language itself, and by the appearance of such things as critical spirit, anxiety to learn and to write, patriotism (see Ascham's words above), and other vague but uncertain features. The lover of English poetry had still to add nothing equal to Chaucer in quality; but he had much more in bulk, and in the anonymous ballads and carols he had patterns and incitements of spirit and form which were not to be found even in Chaucer himself. The lover of English prose had only one very great book, and that was in a kind chronologically obsolete. But he also had much more in bulk of solid work; and the new habit of translating romance, not into verse but into prose, was to lead, slowly but surely, to the great English Novel itself. Also, he had in the work of the best men, from Wyatt onward in the one case, from Ascham if not from Fisher onward in

[1] There does not seem to have been much difficulty or division between the two branches of the language. Gavin Douglas's *Palace of Honour* was first printed, thirty years after his own death, at London about 1553.

[2] The faults and merits of the printing-press may be put very briefly. It multiplies rubbish as well as treasures; but it safeguards the treasure.

the other, the beginnings of a greater, wider, more various verse and prose than Malory or even Chaucer could possibly have made or used. The apprenticeship in both was over; the time of mastery was at hand. To speak figuratively, the shelves of such a library as could not have been conceived earlier were ready, and they were soon going to be filled.



# CHAPTER IV

## THE GREAT ELIZABETHAN PERIOD

Different senses of "Elizabethan"—The starting-point about 1580—Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*—Lyly's *Euphues*—The new drama—*Gorboduc*, etc.—The "University Wits" Peele and others—Marlowe—Character and causes of Elizabethan greatness—Conditions of its drama—Stages of this—Shakespeare's nearest contemporaries—Shakespeare himself · doubts about him—The Shakespearian quality—Non-dramatic poetry—*The Faerie Queene*—Lyric poetry—Sonnets—Historical and satiric poems—Prose—Hooker, Bacon's *Essays*, the *Arcadia*, and Raleigh—"Conceit"—The pamphlet—Short stories—Criticism—Other work: Translation—The Library *c.* 1600.

**Different senses of "Elizabethan."**

THE term "Elizabethan," as applied to literature, is an instance of the occasional convenience of things which are strictly misnomers. It ought to mean the books, and these only, which appeared during the Queen's actual reign. But this would be exceedingly awkward; to some extent even at the beginning, for it would exclude the book, *Tottel's Miscellany* or *Songs and Sonnets*, which, though in part written a good deal earlier and actually published before Mary's death, certainly opens what is generally regarded as Elizabethan; while, on the other hand, it would make mere havoc at the end by cutting off not a little of Shakespeare's own finest work, hardly including anything of Ben Jonson's, and bisecting in the most inconvenient way that of Drayton, Daniel, Raleigh, and others. Moreover, much

later writers, some born actually after the Queen's death, display characters which are still Elizabethan in a way. It is therefore not unusual to extend the term with a small retrospective sense, so as to include the men who ushered it in, like Wyatt, Surrey, Ascham, and others, and a much larger prospective one to the Restoration. Literary unity is thus best secured, and a certain compromise with history or biography can be effected by remembering that Elizabeth was born (1533) before Ascham or Surrey can have written anything of importance, and that men who wrote in the strict Elizabethan style, such as Shirley, were born (1596) years before her reign finished. When Shirley died (1666), *Paradise Lost*, the greatest poem of the post-Elizabethan school, was already in existence, as well as all the great prose of Browne, the greatest prose-man of the same class. So that the extension can support itself even on purely chronological grounds. From the point of view of unity of spirit and character it is unchallengeable.

The starting-point about 1580

In treating it briefly, however, for such a purpose as our present, subdivision is necessary, and the best that we can adopt is probably that now to be taken. The time of preparation has been dealt with, though we may throw back to it a little (especially in connection with drama) in the present chapter, and the later work that was produced by the generation born in the Queen's last years, or a little later still, should be dealt with in the next. In this, without making too much fuss about a nice distinction between Elizabethan and Jacobean work, we shall deal more particularly with the quarter of a century, or nearly so, which passed between the winter of 1579–80 and the Queen's death, exceeding the time a little so as to take in the whole of Shakespeare, and perhaps of one or two others, who died later.

The winter, taking in late autumn and early spring,

has for a long time been the chief season for publishing books in England. But it would be difficult, indeed it would be impossible, to select a winter, from the time when Caxton set up the first English printing-press to the present day, which has produced two books, one in verse and one in prose, more "epoch-making" than that referred to in the last paragraph, when Lyly's *Euphues*[1] and Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* made their appearance. Neither of them—*Euphues* even less than the *Calendar*—is exactly a masterpiece; but both, and the *Calendar* especially, show that English verse and English prose have entered at last on paths which will lead to masterpieces. And though the experimental character is still on both, something great is achieved in each actually. They called Spenser at the time "the new poet," and few poets have ever better deserved the title. A duplicate of the label was not, so far as we know, attached by any one to Lyly, but the imitation which followed was immediate and unprecedented.

The *Shepherd's Calendar* borrowed its title from an older book, but with new applications in both words —"Shepherd's," because of the so-called pastoral[2] form imitated from Theocritus, Virgil, and some recent Renaissance poets in France and Italy; "Calendar," because the poems are distributed under the names of the months. It is in reality a collection of poems, amatory, Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*.

[1] To be strictly accurate, the *first* part of *Euphues* (*The Anatomy of Wit*) had appeared in the spring of 1579; but the second and larger, *Euphues and his England*, did not follow till that of 1580. Between them the *Shepherd's Calendar* was entered on the Stationers' Register in December 1579.

[2] This word "pastoral" is much used in and of the literature of the sixteenth and still more the seventeenth century, while it comes also into that of the eighteenth. The idea of shepherds having something special to do with poetry is a very old one, though, in modern times at any rate, it is nothing but an artificial tradition. It has, however, produced some very beautiful poetry, from Spenser's own work to Mr. Matthew Arnold's.

satirical, political, ecclesiastical, complimentary, and in fact miscellaneous. *Euphues* is a sort of novel, with not much story and with immense digressions on education and other matters. But the substance of neither is of half the importance of the form in both. It is manifest that Spenser is trying a large number of different metres and a form of poetic diction of his own; and it is equally manifest that Lyly is, almost for the first time, deliberately endeavouring to write striking and beautiful prose. Little space as we can give here to individual books, some must be spared for each to show the nature and success of these endeavours.

This success in Spenser's case, if not complete, is very great. Nine of his pieces are written in the new form of recast and precise metre, with little substitution for the most part, but attempting many different kinds, from the decasyllabic and octosyllabic couplets to very intricate lyrical stanzas. And instead of the wooden and undistinguished quality which has been noticed in most of his predecessors since Surrey, we find stateliness, music, variety, charm of all kinds. The solemn but not tedious regularity of the opening six-line stanzas in "January," and the wide range, cheerful or lamenting, of the lyric strophes in "April" and "November," show qualities unlike anything in the preceding period except Sackville, and different even from his. But besides these Spenser tries, in the three others, the opposite irregular kind of verse, with ballad substitution and more, and so makes a link between *Genesis and Exodus* (see above, p. 20) in the thirteenth century and Coleridge's *Christabel* in the nineteenth.

Hardly less remarkable is his diction. This is almost more original than his attempts in metre; nobody since Chaucer seems to have thought of anything like it in southern English, and it has the advantage over the

poetic diction of Middle Scots of being very much less archaic and artificial, and drawn from a much wider range of sources. It is, however, to some extent both artificial and archaic, as it certainly was not the spoken language of the day (it may be doubted whether good poetic diction ever is) and there are a good many Chaucerisms in it. But Spenser blended these with large imitations from the Romance languages and from classical sources, as well as with a touch of Northern dialect—for the poet (1552 ?–99), though born in London, belonged to a Lancashire family,—and seems occasionally to have made words for himself. At any rate, the resulting compound, though not so good as it was subsequently made in *The Faerie Queene*, is a beautiful one, and has to no small extent served as a pattern and origin to English poetic diction ever since. In combination with the metre it does really supply something new in English poetry, and at the same time something which we feel to be connected with all the English poetry that we know down to that of the present day. The effect is not easily describable as a whole, though it is possible to pull it to pieces a little and discover its secrets to some extent. But if it is difficult to describe or define, it is perfectly easy to feel, even for any boy or girl in his or her "teens" who has been tolerably educated, and who is ever going to take any intelligent interest in poetry at all. A page of Chaucer modernised only a very little in spelling and not at all in words, a page of Spenser adjusted only to modern use of capitals and the like, and a page of Tennyson as it is, printed side by side and studied a little, would make an invaluable lesson.

**Lyly's *Euphues*.**

If Lyly's (1554 ?–1606 ?) achievement in *Euphues* was far less than Spenser's in the *Calendar*, and if the former never came anywhere near the latter's still greater

achievement in *The Faerie Queene,* there are some excuses for him besides inferiority of genius. He had a much less attractive subject or subjects, and, great as had been the advance of prose in the hundred and eighty years behind him, it cannot be said that any forms of it, like the forms of verse from Wyatt to Gascoigne, had been suggested. Ascham had died some ten years before, leaving a good plain model, but with hardly any attempt at ornament save a little alliteration and antithetic balance. Lyly set himself to fashion a prose that should be ornate. He retained and exaggerated the alliteration and the antithesis, but he added other devices to them, especially one very peculiar trick, the origin of which has been sought in Spanish, in Latin, and elsewhere, but which no one, except his mere imitators, had ever or has ever used to the same extent. This consisted in larding his prose with endless similes, themselves arranged so as to display both alliteration and antithesis to the utmost, and drawn sometimes from classical history and literature, but oftener from the curious and fanciful *unnàtural* history which the mediaeval imagination had evolved from things of the kind in ancient authorities like Pliny. An extract below, though we cannot give many extracts, is almost necessary to illustrate this.[1] The effect is not even at first very delightful, and soon becomes intolerably monotonous to the modern reader; but it must be remembered that it was the first deliberate attempt to beautify prose as prose.

The new drama.

We cannot, on the other hand, assign to any particular person, or to any particular date, the restarting of the

[1] "For as the precious stone, *Sandastra,* hath nothing in outward appearance but that which seemeth black, but being broken, poureth forth beams like the sun: so virtue sheweth but bare to the outward eye, but being pierced with inward desire, shineth like crystal."

great kind of drama, which is neither pure poetry nor pure prose; but we know fairly well about what time it took place, and we know some of the persons who effected it. During the forty years or so which were occupied by the last stage noticed in the preceding chapter, the activity of drama and the rapidity of its transformations were surprising; but it seemed better not to speak much of them there. The Reformation practically put an end to the miracle-plays, and the extreme Reformers disliked dramatic performances of any kind, partly because of their former connection with the Church, and partly from an impartial objection to all amusements and to most literature. But the popular appetite of the time for these very performances was keen; they were as welcome, or more so, in the houses of the nobility and at Court; and the fact that moralities and interludes had been established, before the ban on the older kind of play, made indulgence of this appetite easier. It was customary, moreover, for persons of distinction and privilege to extend their protection and give their names to companies of players. The Morality itself rapidly changed (we have a striking example of this in Bale's *King Johan* [John]) into a historical drama; the Interlude became first a farce and then a comedy; the prose versions of the romances, and the romantic stories of such miracle plays as *St. Mary Magdalene*, promoted plays on general subjects. Between 1530 and 1580 we have a very large bulk of work, much of it anonymous, or ascribed to names which are hardly more than names to us, and (which is still worse) much of it very uncertainly dated. But even before 1540 John Heywood, who has also left us proverbs, epigrams, etc., wrote not a few interludes which are comedies in little. The study of the classics, as noted above, gave assistance in making the plays

more regular and substantial, and they came more and more near, if not in dramatic and poetical merit, in the general features also noted above, to the kind of drama which every educated person knows in Shakespeare.

*Gorboduc, etc.*

It used to be considered sufficient to single out from this medley dramatic experiment three plays—*Gammer Gurton's Needle*, perhaps by Bishop Still; *Ralph Roister Doister*, by Nicholas Udal the schoolmaster; and *Gorboduc* or *Ferrex and Porrex*, by Sackville the poet and a certain Norton—as, to reverse the order, the first English tragedy, the first English comedy, and the first English farce. Such positive appellations are always rather dangerous; but there is a certain justification about these. *Gorboduc* (1561) is a stiff and uninteresting play, arranged with long speeches and little action, in the classical manner of the Roman tragedian Seneca, which was repeatedly rejected by English taste, but possessing the real and important peculiarity of being the first English play to be written in blank verse—as stiff as the rest of it, but opening endless possibilities. *Ralph Roister Doister* (1550), though written in a sort of doggerel, has in the same way much in it suggested by Latin comedy, is not unamusing, and has something like a plot. *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (1566) is more doggerelish and somewhat coarser, but more in the genuine way of future developments. Except, however, in the blank verse, these plays do not tell us nearly so much about what was going to happen as does the huddle of sometimes very shapeless dramatic compositions which, to the number of some scores still existing, were also produced before 1580. They show the strangest medley of morality and interlude, morality and history, morality and romance, classical imitations in the *Gorboduc* style, pure farce, and half a dozen other kinds; in all sorts of metres, often doggerelish, and with subjects taken

from all sorts of sources, profane and sacred, historical and romantic, popular and learned. They are mostly the roughest novice-work; but it is only after going through them that any one can thoroughly understand the origin and nature of the great and famous Elizabethan drama which followed. If their existence is ignored, such understanding is impossible, though it is not necessary for any but thorough students to read them all, or for beginners to read any.

"The University Wits": Peele and others.

The merit of selecting, unravelling, or disentangling the complex constituents of that drama to some considerable though not final extent from this welter and tangle of hit-or-miss experiment is justly assigned to a group of writers, most of whom were friends, and who were certainly in some cases beginning to work at the time when *The Shepherd's Calendar* and *Euphues* appeared. Indeed Lyly himself was one of them, though his plays stand rather apart from those of the others, and though he does not occupy anything like such a position in the history of drama as he does in the history of prose. These others, whose work is more homogeneous, are George Peele (1558 ?–1597), Robert Greene (1560 ?–1592), Thomas Lodge (1558 ?–1625), Christopher Marlowe (1564 ?–1593), Thomas Nash, and Thomas Kyd (uncertain dates). All, or almost all, were Oxford or Cambridge men. The whole group is often called, from a phrase used at the time, "The University Wits"; and they represent the combined influence of past English literature, and the new classical culture of the Renaissance. To this last Lyly was specially devoted, all his certain plays (*Endymion*, *Campaspe*, etc.) owing their subjects to it; while his peculiarities of style and the abundance of prose which he uses (rare at the time in drama) are also characteristic. Peele, the next eldest of the group, shows well, in the list of plays attributed (one perhaps

uncertainly) to him, the great variety of subject which characterises this drama. *David and Bethsabe* is biblical; *Edward I.* historical in general subject, though very unhistorical in treatment and detail. *The Battle of Alcazar* deals with famous contemporary events (the death or disappearance of King Sebastian of Portugal in battle with the Moors). *The Arraignment of Paris* is classical, *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* (the doubtful one) mere romance, and *An Old Wives' Tale* (which deals with something like the subject of Milton's *Comus*), romantic mixed with other matter. But the great interest of Peele lies in the way in which he softens and beautifies the stiff blank-verse of *Gorboduc*, and of some intermediate plays, into a style still too much inclined to let the lines stand singly, and so not to get the advantages of what is called the "verse paragraph," but occasionally attaining real charm as poetry.

Greene, though perhaps more remarkable for his pamphlets (see below) and his poems than for his plays; Lodge, of whom the same may be said; Nash, a sharp satirist and pamphleteer likewise; and Kyd, whose name is connected, not merely with *The Spanish Tragedy*, one of the most popular of the new plays in a style to be noticed presently, but with *Cornelia*, a fresh attempt to introduce the Latin-French kind of classical tragedy, fortunately again with no success—were minor Peeles in choice of subject and character of work. But he and they are all inferior to Christopher Marlowe, perhaps the youngest of all, and a short-lived man, but the first great dramatist in English; the master in more than one respect of Shakespeare; and as a poet merely to be judged by passages, one of the greatest in our tongue. Marlowe, though he does not yet perceive the full qualities of blank verse, which were left for Shakespeare himself to discover, equals Peele in sweetness, and

**Marlowe.**

surpasses him in grandeur of verse.[1] Like Peele, too, but with more powerful handling, he deals with subjects remarkably different :—two plays on the great barbarian conqueror Tamburlaine or Tamerlane ; one on the legend, lately made popular in Germany, of the Enchanter Faustus ; one on a classical subject, *Dido, Queen of Carthage* ; the first great English example of the "chronicle" or history-play, *Edward II.* ; *The Massacre at Paris*, dealing with the contemporary "St. Bartholomew" ; and *The Jew of Malta*, a capital instance of the new "Tragedy of Horror" (or, as it is less well called, "of Blood"), to which Kyd's chief work, *The Spanish Tragedy*, also belongs.[2]

But besides perfecting these various kinds by his ability as a playwright, and ennobling them by his splendid verse as a poet, Marlowe did something more for English literature. It is a commonplace but not altogether unjust charge against the mediaeval part of that literature, that it is devoid of signs of personal character on the author's part. With the exception of Chaucer and one or two others, usually anonymous, this does apply to English up to the time of which we are speaking ; but Marlowe's case is quite altered. A strong, almost a violent, personality appears in his work, aspiring after beauty certainly, but also after the vast, the terrible, the vague, and embodying these aspirations in the selection and treatment of his subjects. The irresistibleness of Tamburlaine ; the oceans of blood which he sheds with no savage exultation, but as if the thing had to be done ; his driving the kings of Asia as mere beasts of draught ; his passion for his wife Zeno-

[1] Ben Jonson's praise of his "mighty line" is well known and well deserved.

[2] All the plays of this group were probably written later than 1580 and before 1595.

crate, and his amazed indignation at the insolence of nature in making her die; the desires which make Faustus sell his soul to the Fiend, and his agony when the price is about to be levied; the manifold devices whereby the Jew of Malta wreaks his hatred and his revenge on Christians,—all these things have a gigantesque and indeed superhuman character which might easily be extravagant to the point of absurdity (it approaches this nearest in the *Jew*), but which is redeemed and carried off by the splendid poetry in which they are couched, and the enthusiasm which is seen in the poet for the wonders and terrors he is describing.

**Character and causes of Elizabethan greatness.**

This enthusiasm for everything that it touches—leading to what is called in modern times a sort of *megalomania*—extends in every direction during Elizabethan times, and lies at the root of its literary greatness. It combines with perfect artistic restraint perhaps only in Shakespeare; and even in his early work—such as *Titus Andronicus*, in the kind of "Horror tragedy"; as *The Comedy of Errors*, in that of drama with a strong farcical element; and as *Love's Labour's Lost*, in romantic comedy, somewhat overdosed again with farce—the extravagance above referred to is present. But everywhere it prompts the poet, the dramatist, even the prose-writer pure and simple, to attempt great things and to treat them greatly. And it either directly causes, or luckily meets with, a complementary provision of literary craftsmanship which enables it to express itself fully. To some slight notice of the various kinds and instances of this expression, other than those already touched, we must devote the rest of the chapter.

The causes of this great intellectual and emotional wave have been much debated. The victory of one side in the religious struggle of the two preceding generations, and the enthusiasm raised by struggle and victory

alike ; the patriotism similarly excited by the war with Spain ; the personal loyalty (exaggerated sometimes no doubt and misunderstood, but certainly existing) towards Elizabeth herself ; the immense increase of learning due to the Renaissance generally, but arriving late in England ; the excitement—both of a lower kind for gain, and of a higher for quest and knowledge and glory—caused by the opening of new countries and also commerces both West and East,—all these things and others have been eagerly suggested and copiously discussed. Perhaps there is something in them as causes ; certainly it is well to be aware of their existence as facts. But some of them as certainly, if not all together, have existed at times which were not extraordinarily famous for literature ; and perhaps it is better, especially at the stage for which such a book as this is intended, to concentrate attention upon what was actually done and how it was done, not on the dubious and not strictly necessary question why it was done.

What is certain is that the wave, not too extravagantly to be compared to the flood of glowing molten metal that is turned out of a crucible extracted from the furnace, found, like that, a system of channels prepared in the sands of time for its reception. These channels had been drawn by the humble efforts, in schooling and preparation, of the period which we last surveyed, and they were now to come into use. Any one who knows the period well can, in thought, survey the whole field and its branching rivulets of literature like a map ; nor is it difficult to construct a copy of that map for others.

**Conditions of its drama.**

The division which has attracted most attention, which contains most matter of interest for the general reader, and which has by some critics been exalted to the very highest position among all the divisions of

English literature, is that of which alone we have given some minute account already—the drama. The very high praise which it has received (and which was itself a revolt against late seventeenth and eighteenth century neglect) has, as is almost always the case, brought about a fresh reaction. There was a time when it was considered as a whole, if not exactly worthless, so faulty that even Shakespeare was not exempted from condemnation; and more recently it has sometimes been questioned whether, outside Shakespeare, the Elizabethan drama is much more than a curiosity. But this will never be the opinion of any critic who possesses the necessary taste for poetry, trained by critical education, and furnished with the industry necessary to acquaint himself fully with the matter; and it is not necessary to take so much trouble as this in order to acquire a fair knowledge and judgment on the subject. There is indeed no division of literature, English or other, which must be so shocking to persons who draw up rigid rules for different kinds of verse, or prose-writing, and expect these to be followed by all examples of the kind. There are not many such divisions in which, even if such a severe demand is not made, the student will find so much inequality. Further, there is hardly any which, at least as originally printed (most of the MSS. of these plays have been lost or destroyed in one way or another), comes before the reader under such disadvantages. There was no regular law of copyright at the time, and little means of enforcing it if there had been, while it was of course very important to a company of players to keep the plays written for them to themselves as long as possible. Therefore, in many cases, these plays were never printed at all before their author's death. Moreover, what we now call "editing" was almost unknown until the seventeenth century was far advanced,

and the printers of the time were in most cases careless and in many very ignorant. Those readers of Shakespeare, and even of others, who are only acquainted with modern editions, might hardly recognise the originals, which, by the labour of many successive scholars in his case and a few others, have been worked up into their present forms. Lists of *dramatis personae*, stage directions, even division into acts and scenes, are constantly wanting; and the text itself, often taken from rough acting copies, and never, save in the rarest of cases, corrected by the author himself, frequently requires as much pains taken with it as if it were a Greek MS. never edited at all.

But when allowance has been made for all these things and for others—the inexperience of some writers, the too easy writing of others, the coarseness of the time in language, and so forth—there remains such a body of composition as is simply wonderful. From Sackville to Shirley we have hundreds on hundreds of plays, mostly by named authors (though often by authors about whom we know little save their names), but in some cases anonymous. Some of these plays, of course, but extraordinarily few, are wholly, or almost wholly, rubbish. The proportion of the remainder in which real goodness appears, be it only in a single character or a single scene, a passage or two, or a line or two, is very large indeed, and the further proportion, that of the better ones, in which there are to be found more than flashes, is perhaps more surprising still. Moreover, the quality of this goodness is the most wonderful thing of all, for in some not bad periods of literature nothing like it is to be discovered.

The period of this great drama, from Peele to Shirley, is composed of stages which overlap each other so much that it is difficult to divide them without giving false **Stages of this.**

impressions, and these impressions should be more carefully guarded against than they usually are. One thinks, from stories as well as histories, of Shakespeare and Jonson as companions, and so in a way they were; yet Jonson wrote no play till Shakespeare had almost reached the middle of his career, and continued to write for more than twenty years after Shakespeare's death. We are apt to think of Beaumont and Fletcher as representing a distinctly younger school than Shakespeare, and so in fact they do; yet Beaumont died in the same year with Shakespeare, while Fletcher survived him hardly a decade. By keeping a fairly careful eye on the facts and dates, it is possible to steer clear of really harmful confusion, and we may hope to do so in the brief account of the whole matter to be given in this chapter and the next. Yet the whole period is so crowded and full that cautions can hardly be too many. George Chapman (1559–1634), who probably wrote plays, and almost certainly wrote poems, before Shakespeare had written anything, continued to write till long after Fletcher, about the same time as Jonson, and only a few years before the closing of the London theatres in the Rebellion put an end to the whole thing. James Shirley (1596–1666), who survived not only this but the twenty years' interval, and lived and wrote till after Dryden had begun, was born before the first certain and distinct notice of Shakespeare's work that we possess. Further, Chapman and Shirley, who were contemporaries for forty years, actually wrote at least one play together. Yet there is a marked difference between the styles of the two when separate. On the whole, the student will best keep to the right path if he conceives Elizabethan drama as in its purely elementary stage before Peele; as brought into great but imperfect activity by the Marlowe group; and as carried into perfection by

Shakespeare, round whose earlier time and work the work, though in some cases not the time, of Chapman himself, Marston, Dekker, Webster, Middleton, Heywood, and Tourneur may be gathered. Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher, though much of their work is contemporary with these, represent changes which will, with the still later stage represented by Massinger, Ford, and Shirley, be best taken in the next chapter.

**Shakespeare's nearest contemporaries.**

Even from the subordinate group which has been first named (but without including Shakespeare himself), the power, the variety, the marvellous life and colour of the Elizabethan drama could be not ill comprehended. From Chapman we have a large collection of plays, including some capital comedies (*All Fools* the best) and a remarkably fine though gloomy and somewhat bombastic series of tragedies from recent French history, dealing with actual persons (Bussy D'Ambois, Biron, and Chabot), which excited the admiration of the youthful Dryden and the disapproval of his later judgment — a valuable commentary on the change of taste. John Marston (1575 ?–1634) at one time was on close enough terms of friendship with Ben Jonson to write a play with him and Chapman (a capital one too, *Eastward Ho !*), but at another in company with Dekker fell out with Ben and was "beaten" by him (at least Ben said so). He is, in this and in the few other particulars we have of him a curious instance of the curious lives of these dramatists. His career in youth is suggested by such quarrels, and by the character of his whole work—a passionate poem on the classical story of Pygmalion and the Image, some of the very coarsest and fiercest of the coarse and fierce satires of the end of Elizabeth's reign, and a series of powerful but extravagantly gloomy and "horror-mongering" tragedies, *Antonio and Mellida*, *Sophonisba*, etc., with comedies

(*What You Will*, etc.), which have little laughter except of a sardonic kind in them. But all this seems to have led up to a quiet later life as a country clergyman, and a total abstinence from letters. Thomas Dekker's own plays, especially *Old Fortunatus*, are somewhat chaotic, but abound in charming natural touches, as in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, a pleasant comedy; while one of his characters in another play, Bellafront, is almost Shakespearian in truth to nature.[1] So are also, in different and more tragic ways, Beatrice-Joanna, the heroine of Thomas Middleton's (1570?–1627) greatest play, *The Changeling*,[2] and her villain-lover De Flores; while the same author's abundant work supplies also another tragedy (*The Witch*) which has curious connections with *Macbeth*, a remarkable political drama (*The Game of Chess*), and a very interesting series of plays representing ordinary London life, treated from the half-realist, half-romantic standpoint of the time. From Cyril Tourneur (1575?–1626) we have only two plays, and those of the deepest dye of the "Horror" class, *The Atheist's Tragedy* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*, but he can write lines and even passages of the greatest poetry.[3] Of the same kind, but greater still, is John Webster (1580?–1625), the author of the famous *Duchess of Malfy* and *Vittoria Corombona*, who has been not more finely than justly

[1] Dekker's birth and death dates are quite unknown: his working time was probably from about 1595 to about 1630.

[2] This and some others of Middleton's were written, after a fashion common at the time, and more than once glanced at here, in collaboration with another playwright, William Rowley.

[3] A single line, well known in quotation, though perhaps not quite so well known with its context—

Mother! come from that poisonous woman there!

(the speech of a daughter whose parent has advised her to shame), is a good instance of the kind of thing, frequent here, which you may search whole periods of English literature, and almost whole literatures of other countries, without finding.

called by Mr. Swinburne an inlet "of the sea which is Shakespeare." Thomas Heywood (?–1650)—the most voluminous of all (author or part-author of some two hundred plays, about a fifth of which we possess)—is of a quieter and more domestic temper, though he has some fine scenes of foreign adventure, more than one spirited dramatising of English history, and one piece of almost intolerable pathos, *A Woman Killed with Kindness.*

The importance of Shakespeare himself may seem to demand longer notice than this book can easily afford, but there is more likelihood of actual acquaintance with his work than in other cases. On one question which has recently been discussed with the most unnecessary abundance it is possible, and perhaps desirable, to speak authoritatively even to students beginning literature. That question concerns the assignment of what are known as "the plays of Shakespeare" to some one else, preferably Bacon. As to this it is sufficient to say:

**Shakespeare himself: doubts about him.**

I. That all "external" evidence (title-pages, quotations, and references of contemporaries or near successors and the like) without exception assigns the authorship of these plays to William Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon.

II. That all "internal" evidence (that is to say, the quality and character of the work itself) shows it to be different from that of any other known writer of the time.

III. That, in particular, there is hardly any one to whom a skilled critic would less soon ascribe authorship of these plays than to Bacon.

IV. That the arguments actually brought against Shakespeare's authorship are the flimsiest and most fantastic that have ever been advanced even in literary squabbles—which are fertile in such things.

From these positions it will be difficult to find a single person, thoroughly versed in literature in general, and Elizabethan literature in particular, as well as in the theory and practice of comparative criticism, who will dissent. The present writer, the greater part of whose life has been spent in acquainting himself with such matters, does not know of one such person, dead or alive, who is or has been a "Baconian." To explain, however, in what the particular character or quality above mentioned consists, and to put that explanation in a few words, is impossible. It can be analysed to a certain extent, but not finally; though it can be felt, to a certain other and much greater extent, by a very young reader of intelligence, fair education, and a natural taste for literature. Its difficulty as well as its greatness is well hit off in the phrase of Shakespeare's first great critic in times subsequent to his own—of the first great critic in English literary history—the poet Dryden. "He was the man who of all modern and perhaps ancient poets had the largest and most comprehensive soul," said Dryden, who compressed and slightly heightened the opinion in talking elsewhere of Shakespeare's "universal mind." Earlier, John Hales (1584–1656), a man of great literary power, and still greater reputation, himself a contemporary of Shakespeare for more than thirty years, and one who must have known all about him, had said in a kind of hyperbole that whatever any poet had said well he would produce it better said in Shakespeare. Reducing this to the strict and literal truth—that wherever Shakespeare says something like what another poet has said he says it better, and that in a thousand places he says magnificently what no other poet has ever said at all—we get, with Dryden's judgment, a useful and not in the least exaggerated estimate of him from two sides. His range of thought is almost

The Shakespearian quality.

unlimited, and his power of expressing that thought is equally so. He has not chosen—if he had done so he must have narrowed his range in both ways—always to write in a grand style on grand subjects. Being one of the most natural of men—as he had to be, to be also one of the greatest—he had, like other people, to learn his business, and to do some prentice-work in learning it. Working as a playwright for his living, not writing in a palace for his own pleasure, he had sometimes to consider tastes which were popular then but are not now. But even in his earliest and least perfect work—even in the horror-tragedy and the farce-comedy mentioned above—we can find things to be hardly bettered elsewhere; and in his greatest work we are constantly finding things that cannot be equalled anywhere. He took the verse—sweet and splendid at its best, but a little monotonous and declamatory—of Peele and Marlowe, and he made it, by use of the devices of overlapped lines, varied pauses, trisyllabic feet, and redundant syllables, the most magnificent and versatile metre known to poetry. He took from all sides (and probably invented in supplement) words which made the largest vocabulary of English yet used in literature. He accepted subjects of the most varied kinds, and treated them in the most original ways. He created characters as a great sculptor makes images, only infusing life into them as well; and he also created the art of constructing a play by character, and not by mere mechanical plot. In the long series of English historical dramas partly improved—but so much improved!—from previous attempts; in the few but almost finer Roman tragedies, especially *Antony and Cleopatra*; in the delightful romantic comedies, *As You Like It, Twelfth Night, Much Ado about Nothing*, which again he practically invented; in the four unapproached tragic

masterpieces of *Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*; and in the remarkable trio, rather difficult to classify (*Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*), with which he probably finished his work,—he showed all these masteries and more. He put in his plays, now and then, prose almost as unsurpassable as his verse, and lyrics which to this day are amongst the most exquisite in English. And so, with the exception of dull-silly folk, who are unfortunately numerous, and clever-silly folk, who are unfortunately not unknown, he is recognised by all as the greatest writer of England, perhaps the greatest of the world.

**Non-dramatic poetry.** But though this dramatic expression of the literary outburst of the late sixteenth century in England has secured the principal attention of posterity from its novelty, its intrinsic excellence, its variety, its volume, and the fact that it produced the unrivalled master just referred to, it would be a fatal mistake to think that no other divisions require attention or repay study. On the contrary, there is hardly a branch of literature—even some which were later to be somewhat arrested in development—which does not flourish in the wonderful quarter-century from 1580 to 1603. Poetry proper—that is to say, poetry which does not adopt the dramatic form—ranks next to the drama, partly, but by no means wholly or mainly because here also there is one prominent figure, already partly discussed—that of Spenser. Although this great poet has traditionally held and deserved the title of "the poets' poet," he has never lacked depreciators, and very lately they have not been few or insignificant. Yet the student may rest assured that appreciation of Spenser is one of the tests of a person's appreciation of poetry as poetry. Had he written nothing but *The Shepherd's Calendar* this could not be said. But ten years later he followed it up with

*The Faerie Queene.*

the first instalment of *The Faerie Queene*, and at different times, before his too early death in 1599, with more of this poem and with others, which, taken together, rank second only to Shakespeare's work as demonstrations of the magnificence of Elizabethan literature. Basing himself to some extent, for episodes and general treatment, on the great Italian verse-romances of Ariosto and Tasso—but taking a quite original subject, retaining or rather reviving in a marvellously changed spirit the English allegorical tendency of former centuries—Spenser has, in *The Faerie Queene*, produced a poem itself often imitated, but never approached, in which the very number and variety of its attractions may perhaps partly account for some of the failure to enjoy it. Profiting by his experiments in the *Calendar*, he now produced an entirely original stanza,[1] the famous "Spenserian" of nine lines (eight of them decasyllabic and the ninth an Alexandrine, rhymed *ababbcbcc*), which is in itself the most beautiful of all such arrangements, and which has the remarkable faculty of connecting itself with its companion stanzas as no other does. To supply this with a proper diction, he again improved on that of his first book, making it less archaic and dialectic, imparting more of the classical and continental elements, softening and dignifying it, and so composing a style which has practically been the foundation of all English poetic diction of the more elaborate kind since. He used this verse and this language first to tell his story, and, secondly, as we may say, to *illustrate* it with word-pictures; and he did both with such intricate and manifold art that people who either cannot simply enjoy, or are foiled in their endeavours to analyse, have been

[1] It is sometimes said that he took it from the Italians. This is simply false: there is no such stanza in Italian or in any other language.

discontented with him. Not so fit readers. The story of *The Faerie Queene* is ostensibly an allegory of the Virtues and their correspondent or opponent Vices—not seldom doubled with further allegories of a political, ecclesiastical, and even personal type. But it is quite possible to discard these allegories, or at any rate to pay very little attention to them, and to read it as a pure story of knightly adventure. We have, unluckily, only half of it; and it is therefore not possible to be quite sure how the twelve different books were to be finally knit together; but to accuse it of incoherency is for the same reason quite unjust, and there are actually hints in what we have of things which were to follow and effect the knitting. Meanwhile, verse and language carry the reader on (if he is a fit reader) with a soft and unbroken motion, unknown in any other poem. And all the while the same instruments effect the "illustration" above spoken of—a series of word- and verse-pictures, now of background, now of action itself, which, for beauty and variety and a dream-like procession and connection, are again unmatched in literature. Spenser, except in a few touches, hardly attempts, and certainly does not achieve, character—the point in which he is chiefly distinguished from Shakespeare. But the two supplement each other wonderfully. Shakespeare is the master of Life; Spenser the master of Dream, which Shakespeare himself acknowledged to be as human as Life itself.

But just as Shakespeare was preceded, accompanied, and followed by a crowd of dramatists only inferior to himself, so was Spenser, not indeed preceded, but accompanied and followed by a still greater crowd of poets, some emulating his own achievements, some trying lines which he did not himself attempt. The earliest development, however, that of lyric, was of this latter

Lyric poetry.

class. It may seem strange that Spenser should have given us so little of this, for there are beautiful patches of it in the *Calendar*; his command of what has been called "the greater ode"[1] in the poems entitled *Epithalamion* and *Prothalamion* is almost unsurpassed, and there are passages in *The Faerie Queene*—notably the song of Phaedria and that sung in the Bower of Bliss (Book II.)—where the stately stanza takes a lyric tone of the softest and most varied beauty. But for some reason he did not affect it much. On the other hand, chiefly though not wholly in collections[2] of the kind which *Tottel's Miscellany* had started many years before, in plays and pamphlets and independently, numerous writers, some already mentioned, some not—Lodge, Breton, Greene, Constable, Campion, Raleigh, and many others—did the most delightful things, adapted to music of all sorts; dealing, though mainly with love, with subjects of all kinds, and exhibiting the newly acquired powers of the language in the most triumphant and delectable fashion. Shakespeare, as has been said, here also heads, if Spenser does not, the chorus of singers, and it has been easy for men of taste in modern times to compile, from the various sources above glanced at, anthologies of Elizabethan song which it is, once more, impossible to surpass in any other time or in any other language.

The actual title of *Tottel's Miscellany* was *Songs and Sonnets*, and, as we saw, it was strictly deserved, though

[1] By this is meant not a short song in uniform stanzas of moderate compass, but an elaborate concerted arrangement like *Lycidas*, Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*, Gray's *Bard* and *Progress of Poesy*, or, in more modern times, Tennyson's *Lotos-Eaters* and *Vision of Sin*.

[2] Often entitled with the quaint "conceit" of the time, as in *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* (1576) and *The Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions* (1578). But these were both before Spenser, and not very brilliant. The fine things are in Clement Robinson's *Handful of Pleasant Delights* (1584), *The Phoenix Nest* (1593), and above all in *England's Helicon* (1600) and Davison's *Poetical Rhapsody* (1602).

the word sonnet was, till much later, rather loosely used. For some reason, however, the strict sonnet was very little practised for more than thirty years after *Tottel* appeared. Then, especially in the last decade of the century, an extraordinary number of sonnet-collections came out. In this group Spenser and Shakespeare both appear, and Shakespeare's sonnets are the greatest in all the world's literature. But almost all the poets just mentioned, and others, especially Sir Philip Sidney (1554–1586), whose work is among the best of all, followed the fashion—Sidney indeed may be said to have restarted it. Students should beware of attaching too much importance to attempts recently made, with good intentions and with a most laudable industry, to derogate from the originality of these sonnets, and even of Elizabethan poetry generally, by alleging imitation of earlier French poets, especially Desportes, of Italians from Petrarch downwards, and of some Spaniards. It is true that Petrarch *is* to a certain extent the original of many, if not most, of them; that the French poets of the so-called *Pléiade* imitated him and other Italians, and that the Elizabethans were acquainted with, and to some extent followed, all of these. But the test of poetry is not originality of subject, or even of thought; for all subjects are open, and all thoughts are possible, to every human mind. It is the originality of treatment in which the individual power comes out. And here Elizabethan poetry can acknowledge its debts and show a balance after paying them as few other poetries can.

Sonnets.

Nor was it wanting in larger attempts at verse-narrative, though they were mostly dwarfed by *The Faerie Queene*. An interesting historical school arose, of which Michael Drayton (1563?–1631—*The Barons' Wars, Heroical Epistles*, etc.), Samuel Daniel (1562–1619—

*The Civil Wars*, etc.), William Warner (1558 ?–1609—*Albion's England*) were members; philosophical poetry (a doubtful kind, but one in which Spenser had set a fine example) made its appearance; and the imperfect and second-hand satiric experiments of Barclay, Wyatt, and Gascoigne were revived and improved in direct following of the Latin satirists by Hall (afterwards Bishop), Lodge, Donne, Marston, Tourneur, and others. Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and *Rape of Lucrece* stand at the head of a number of short-long poems on which the episodes of *The Faerie Queene* undoubtedly had much influence; and almost every kind of poetry, epigram, pastoral, and what not, had its devotees.

**Historical and satiric poems.**

**Prose.**

The achievements in prose of the great Elizabethan period are less brilliant in appearance, and they are subject to the disadvantage which, in all but a very few cases, attaches to prose as distinguished from verse. Except in those cases, prose, which is mainly devoted to exposition of fact, or statement and defence of opinion, becomes in a way obsolete when later expositions of the fact with fuller knowledge, or treatments of opinion from new points of view, are made; a great poem, depending in no degree on fact or opinion, but only on poetical treatment, can never be superseded. But to the historian and the student of history there is no such difference between the two; and the earliest attempts in all divisions of literature retain their interest. Those earliest attempts, in a fully developed vocabulary, and with a range of knowledge still definitely comparable to that of modern times, date from our present time in almost every department of literature. Even the newspaper and the novel, though the former is still absent as such, and the latter very rudimentary till later, find their originals after a fashion here. Moreover, which is of the first importance for the present purpose,

the method of treatment, the preparation of styles suitable for all prose purposes, is still more in direct relation with modern literature. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that we here come to the point up to which everything earlier is preparatory, from which everything later is derived. If the student does not understand what has gone before he will not understand this: if he does not understand this thoroughly, and on all sides, he will make continual mistakes about what has followed.

Hooker, Bacon's *Essays*, the *Arcadia*, and Raleigh.

The greatest books of purely Elizabethan literature in prose—books which can never become obsolete, and which started important styles—are Richard Hooker's *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1594–97) and Francis Bacon's *Essays* (1597), the former entirely written within the reign, the latter much enlarged later. Hooker is often coupled or contrasted with Lyly as an exponent of a plain and sober style. His own is indeed quite devoid of Lyly's fantastic ornaments, but it possesses much higher merit, because of the quiet but extremely effective arrangement of its sentences. They rise, continue at a certain level, and fall again, without the slightest imitation of verse, either in rhythm or diction, but with a result hardly less satisfactory to the ear than that of fine verse itself, and adapted, as verse never can be completely, to sober argument and exposition. Bacon's first *Essays* (the first in English with a single exception just previous to them, and of no importance) may have been prompted by the famous French examples of Montaigne, though they are very different in style, being compressed to the utmost degree, and consisting rather of axiomatic headings for future expansion than of fully worked out thoughts. Later, however, he wrote less tersely. A third book, now much more of a curiosity than these, but in itself almost as important as a begin-

ning, is Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, a prose romance of the pastoral kind, with large intermixtures of verse, which was written for his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, perhaps partly by her, and published, four years after his death, in 1590. Its style is not directly euphuistic, but almost as mannered and artificial; and it contrasts, no less remarkably, with the unaffected and scholarly but not in the least pedantic manner of Hooker. Sir Walter Raleigh's (1552?–1618) unequal but in parts splendid *History of the World* was written later, during his imprisonment, but it represents the Elizabethan way of thought, and the less "conceited" form of Elizabethan style, very admirably.[1]

It is, however, in a much larger group of individually smaller prose works that the feature just referred to—one of the most noteworthy, and one of the most debated in English literature—specially appears. "Conceit" in this sense is a term applied to thoughts, and to the corresponding phrases that express them, avoiding simple and straightforward utterance deliberately, and trying for novelty, intricacy, suggestion, and surprise. Euphuism itself may be said to be a system of conceits; the *Arcadia*, as has been said, is full of them. At its best and at its worst, conceit is, as it were, the ruling **"Conceit."** passion of the Elizabethan writer. Shakespeare illustrates both the good side of it, in his most magnificent passages, and the bad in his caricatures and parodies of the fashion.[2] A slightly changed handling of conceit gave, in turn, the erudite and pregnant disquisitions of the Jacobean writers, and the "metaphysical" poetry

[1] Raleigh had actually published, in 1591, a striking account of Sir Richard Grenville's famous death-fight at Flores.

[2] In his earliest work he has been thought to be using it sincerely and without suspicion of its faults. But one had better not be too sure of this, especially as regards *Love's Labour's Lost*.

of the Carolines,[1] both of which we shall meet in the next chapter. And when the tide turned, as we shall see in the chapter after that, nothing was more characteristic of the Restoration than the dislike of what was now called "false wit," an ingenious name for conceit itself. Indeed, to the present day, even persons who sincerely love literature and poetry for themselves can be divided into two classes—those who enjoy conceit, and those who, if they do not exactly hate, dislike it. Conceit, in fact, is one of the numerous points of difference which distinguish the Romantic from the Classic ideal of literature.

The Elizabethan "pamphleteers" (a general term which has been rather specially utilised in regard to them) illustrate this peculiarity of style very largely; but having mentioned the fact, we may be better concerned with the contents of their works, which are of great importance to the understanding of the general literary character of the time. There being, as has been said, an intense interest in all sorts of subjects, and a desire to write about them; there being also nothing like the modern periodical to receive and publish "articles" on these subjects; people, if they wanted to write, had to write, and people who wanted to read had to read, little separate books. And they did. Almost everybody, except Shakespeare, wrote pamphlets; for the first issue of Bacon's *Essays* might well be called one, and Spenser's *State of Ireland*, not published till after his death, is a political pamphlet of the first class. Nicholas Breton (1545 ?–1626 ?) was nothing but a pamphleteer, for we also speak of verse-pamphlets at this time. Raleigh, Greene, Lodge, Dekker, Middleton, Nash, and many

The pamphlet.

[1] The student should resolutely refuse the term Carol*ian*, which has been recently used. It has no authority; it is bad in formation; its only excuse (to avoid clashing with the feminine name "Caroline") is puerile; and it at least suggests a false quantity.

others wrote them. A whole furious and curious series of pamphlets on the difference between Puritan and anti-Puritan conceptions of the Church of England exists, by many different writers, and is called, from the nick-name taken on one side, the "Martin Marprelate" controversy. Pamphlets were written not merely on religion and politics (both very dangerous subjects at the time), but on all sorts of themes down to trade. But perhaps the most interesting divisions of them (some of the members of which exceed pamphlet scale) are devoted to two subjects which had never yet figured largely in English prose—novel-writing and criticism. *Euphues* produced a whole brood of shorter stories, some directly connected with it, and sometimes written by persons of the quality of Lodge and Greene, both of whom in turn supplied Shakespeare with subjects for his plays. Their friend Nash is thought by some, though perhaps not quite correctly, to have made a greater stride than any one else towards the modern novel in his *Unfortunate Traveller*, which describes the experiences of an adventurer in Henry the Eighth's reign, and the loves (probably invented) of the poet Surrey and his "Geraldine."

**Short stories.**

**Criticism.**

But the criticism is important to us doubly, both as a new kind of literature in itself, and as dealing with all other kinds. Hitherto, as has once or twice been noticed, writing in mediaeval England had been almost wholly uncritical. In 1553 Wilson, Ascham's friend (see above, p. 62), had published an *Art of Rhetoric*; Ascham himself had made critical remarks in his *Schoolmaster*; Gascoigne (see above, pp. 57-8) had written short but pithy notes on poetry. But earlier and meanwhile a very large modern critical literature had accumulated in Italy, and a not inconsiderable one in France; and this, like other things, found disciples to establish it in

English. King James the Sixth of Scotland wrote (1584), probably under the guidance of Gascoigne, of the great French poet Ronsard, and of his tutor Buchanan, a companion to Gascoigne's own tract, with special reference to Scots verse. A treatise, too large almost to be called a pamphlet, was published in 1589, but probably composed earlier, by an unknown writer, probably George or Richard Puttenham, and a much briefer one by William Webbe in 1586, which contains the first overflow of delight at "the new poet," Spenser. All this was closely connected with a dispute about the introduction of classical metres in English. Outside of these purely technical matters, great interest had been excited by Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*,[1] itself caused by a Puritan attack on the stage from the pen of Stephen Gosson, and just at the end of our period a memorable duel took place (1602) on the classical metre question between two poets, Campion the song-writer (who had no reason to decry English rhymed verse, for he wrote it exquisitely) and Samuel Daniel, who, in a short space, has left us as much general as special good sense on the subject.

Except Hooker, the ecclesiastical writers of the actual reign of Elizabeth were scarcely up to the standard which we shall find reached by their immediate successors; and Bacon's philosophical work was mostly later.

**Other work: Translation.**

But translation, which, to a short-sighted judge, might seem superfluous now and to have done its work, was almost at its zenith, and, besides flooding the language with new words and phrases, it set great patterns in the actual versions. North's *Plutarch* (1579) earlier, and Florio's *Montaigne* (1603) later, are among the most

[1] Sidney certainly wrote this about the great year 1579–80, the year of *The Shepherd's Calendar* and *Euphues* and the first "University Wit" plays; but, like most of his work, it was not published till after his death, in 1595.

important books in English prose, not merely from the immense influence they exerted (probably no books except the Bible were so much read for a time), but from the raciness and vigour of the translations themselves. Great collections of the voyages and travels which were of so much practical interest to the time, and were one of its chief glories, began later to be made: the theory and practice of education, which had occupied men like Ascham and Lyly, was still more technically considered by other men like Richard Mulcaster (1530?–1611), head-master of Merchant Taylors' and St. Paul's. In fact, as we began by saying, there was hardly any department of literary activity in which the energy of the time did not at least strive to make itself felt, and there were few in which it did not achieve memorable results.

As we pursue the survey of possible catalogues of an English Library at different epochs, we come here to a stage of certainly almost startling enlargement and exaltation in a very short time. The enlargement is no doubt partly due to the invention of printing, but the exaltation is so only in a very small degree. It is easier, no doubt, for a man to write good books when he has an increased number of other books, easily accessible and readable, before him, but it is also easier for him to write bad ones, and more likely that he will do so. The other causes of an apparent increase of actual genius which have been set forth in the foregoing chapter have, of course, much more to do with it. But the result is certain. A glance at the former summaries will show both what was present and what was absent earlier. At the beginning of the present period, say a little before 1580, there were only two books of certainly first-class quality on the shelves we are imagining—Chaucer's *Works* and Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*,—though some of no despicable kind had been added in the half-century before, especially since the Queen's accession. Now, in 1600 or thereabouts, the owner of the library could have added, even to this highest (or rather central) shelf, the poems of Spenser and much more than half the plays of Shakespeare, including some of his best. But he

The Library c. 1600.

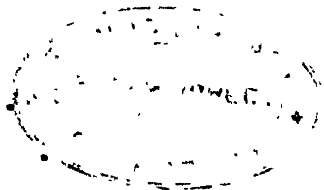
also had at his disposal a great many more books which contained, in different proportions, matter of the first class, and a great many more which were much better than they could have been at an earlier period—the plays[1] of the University Wits (including the masterpieces of Marlowe) and of the earliest of those later dramatists who were contemporary with Shakespeare, forming the newest and most striking section. In poetry there were the new Miscellanies, containing delightful lyrics by the score, if not the hundred; the historical pieces of Drayton and Daniel; the sonneteers from Sidney and Watson onwards; the satirists, and some admirable translations, of which the *Tasso* (or *Godfrey of Bulloigne*, 1600) of Fairfax, just appearing at the moment, was only the best.

In prose the acquisitions were of course much larger in bulk, and if they were not quite so much distinguished by that enthusiastic imagination which animated the verse, there was no want of instruction, or even of delight, proportionate to that bulk. The verse-translation just noticed was largely exceeded in quantity by that in prose which has been mentioned above. If Lyly's *Euphues* and Sidney's *Arcadia* were not very interesting novels in the modern sense, they were at any rate remarkable literary attempts at the novel, which could not yet be born; and they were accompanied by crowds of translations and adaptations of stories from French, Italian, and Spanish. These latter often formed part of the curious new pamphlet literature, which could not have existed without the press, and which now gave readers something to read about on almost every kind of subject. The "chronicle," or bare and more or less clumsy records of events, had been already enlivened by Holinshed (1578) and others, and was just passing into real history in the hands of Raleigh and Knolles (*History of the Turks*, 1604—perhaps our first accomplished *history*). Fresh on the shelves were those first *Essays* of Bacon, which were to have so large and delightful a family in the following centuries. Various translations of the Bible, which a careful collector might have accumulated from the days of Tyndale (1525–31) onwards, already contained much of the material of the greater one which was to begin in a few years. Amid the angry and mostly inferior controversial work of the time, Hooker's great book provided something like a

[1] Remembering always that a good many were not printed till later, or at all (see above, p. 78).

companion in prose to Spenser and Shakespeare in verse. And if the book-buyer was thoroughly interested in literature, there would have been a small collection of work of a kind unknown but a generation before, the criticism of Ascham, Wilson, Gascoigne, being reinforced by Puttenham and Webbe. There were as yet no newspapers;[1] scientific and philosophical writing was still generally in Latin, though it was on the very verge of ceasing to be confined thereby. But in almost every other respect the library was complete in kinds, though some of them might hardly yet have got out of their rudiments.

[1] There used to be a fable about one published in the Armada time; but it was only a fable. A *Weekly News*, issued by Nathaniel Butter in 1622, is generally said to be the earliest.



# CHAPTER V

## JACOBEAN AND CAROLINE LITERATURE

The later stages of the larger "Elizabethan" time—Ben Jonson—Beaumont and Fletcher—Approach of decadence—Bad blank verse, etc., of Davenant and others—Massinger, Ford, and Shirley—Non-dramatic poetry—Drayton, Daniel, Fairfax—W. Browne, Wither, and the "Heroic" Romancers — Sylvester — Lyric — Donne and "Metaphysical" poetry—Cowley, Carew, Herrick, and Waller—Crashaw, Herbert, and Vaughan—Suckling, Lovelace, and others—Milton—His minor poems—*Paradise Lost*, etc.—Importance of his verse—Peculiar eminence of prose at this time—Its character—Burton—Fuller—Milton—Taylor—Sir Thomas Browne—Hobbes and Clarendon—The Authorised Version of the Bible—Weak points in Elizabethan literature—The change to which they led—The Library a little before 1660.

**The later stages of the larger "Elizabethan" time.**

As was explained in the preceding chapter, the subject of the present offers no really sharp division from that of its predecessor, and as far as the lives of actual authors are concerned, is indissolubly spliced to it. Yet since the larger Elizabethan literature possesses, as was also explained, a living spirit of its own, that spirit may be expected to pass through variations or stages corresponding to those of ordinary life. And the historical divisions here answer to these stages in a very remarkable manner. Elizabethan literature proper is youth or rather young manhood, with its exuberance, discursiveness, and hope; Jacobean is middle age, more sober and concentrated, if less enterprising; Caroline,

though showing no points of actual dotage, as some other literary periods do, does show something like what is called "decadence," though this decadence is relieved by the presence of individual writers of such power and charm as almost belie this general character, and by whole classes of delightful work. And then comes a revolution (to be dealt with in the next chapter), which obviates actual decay altogether by replacing the old growth with a new. But we shall not meet in this chapter, as we did in the last, great new *kinds* of literature—the isolated work of Milton is the only apparent exception, and that an individual one, not a new kind or class. And in some cases, notably that of criticism, there is almost an arrest of progress.

**Ben Jonson.**

Yet even in criticism this arrest is not noticeable in the first name which we have to mention—one to some extent postponed from the last chapter—that of Ben Jonson. Jonson, perhaps the last,[1] was also the best of the Elizabethan critics; and his entire work, which is large and varied, is pervaded by the spirit of criticism. It consists not merely of drama and of non-dramatic poetry, but of prose, both dramatic and non-dramatic; and though he seems to have begun to write nearly twenty years before Shakespeare's death, he is always, not, as used to be foolishly thought, a grudging and spiteful rival of the Master, but an independent and to some extent recalcitrant successor.

Now as his influence was very great—for he really deserves to some extent the title of "Dictator of Literature" during his time, as only two other men, Dryden and his own half-namesake Samuel Johnson, have deserved

[1] We do not know when his principal critical work, *Discoveries* or *Timber*—a most interesting combination of adopted and original observations—was written; but it probably represents notes made at different times of his life. The very pungent and lively *Conversations*, reported by Drummond of Hawthornden, date from 1618.

it since—and as his attitude was generally consistent in everything that he wrote, he merits very particular attention. The character of purely Elizabethan literature in the limited sense had been, as we have seen, unlimited and spontaneous exuberance of attempt, disdaining or transcending mere rule. Rule was what Jonson strove to produce and observe. Although he certainly had not the advantage of the full school and university training of the time, he was a very good scholar, especially, though not merely, in Latin; and by means of the writers of both classical languages, especially the post-Augustan Latins, he endeavoured to correct English. He thought, though his admiration of Shakespeare was expressed splendidly and unmistakably in more than one passage, that Shakespeare was a loose, careless, and irregular writer;[1] and though he did not attempt to copy strict classical originals in drama or contemporary French imitations of them he paid more attention to apparent unity of plot than Shakespeare did. He wrote indeed a large collection of masques (plays usually for amateurs to act, in which plot and character almost disappear, and the dialogue which remains is subordinated to music and to elaborate scenery and machinery). And his unfinished pastoral drama, *The Sad Shepherd*, apparently written late in life, is a delightful thing, and with Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* makes one of the prettiest pairs in English literature. But his two Roman plays, *Sejanus* and *Catiline*, contrast most remarkably with Shakespeare's, consisting mainly of stately speeches, often literally translated from Sallust and Tacitus. And the bulk of his dramatic work presents a peculiar form

[1] It cannot be learnt too early that Jonson's testimony as to Shakespeare, not wholly favourable as it is, is absolutely decisive as to the Shakespearian authorship of the plays.

of comedy, with rather elaborate plots, but with the characters arranged almost wholly with a view to the display of what were then called "humours"—that is to say, special tastes, hobbies, follies, or even vices of individuals or classes. His poems, often exceedingly beautiful, are classical in form and title, epigrams, "epodes," and the like. And his prose, of which, unfortunately, much was lost by a fire in his study, differs notably from Lyly's on the one side and from Bacon's on another, by an attempt, not at all unsuccessful, at classical plainness and simplicity, while it differs from Hooker's on a third, by much less musical rhythm.

**Beaumont and Fletcher.**

The pair of dramatists who rank with Jonson as next to Shakespeare in general greatness—Francis Beaumont (1584–1616) and John Fletcher (1579–1625)—may be considered as having made their departure from him in the opposite direction, that of the Romantic, not the Classical side. Their work is very extensive: it consists of fifty-two plays, being the largest that we have from any single or joint authorship of the time. The range of subject, if not that of thought and poetry, is also wider than Shakespeare's, and very much wider than Jonson's; while, unlike the latter's, it consists almost equally of tragedy and comedy, or tragi-comedy, with one admirable example of farce-burlesque on a large scale, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle.* Regarded from the side of versification, it exhibits a great extension of a feature which is also notable in Shakespeare's latest plays, the licence of the redundant syllable.[1] Regarded from the side of spirit and temper,

[1] As thus:

"If I had swelled the soldier or intend|ed
An act in person leading to dishon|our,
As you would fain have forced me, witness Hea|ven
Whose clearest understanding of all truth | is"
etc., etc.

Beaumont and Fletcher show a rather more mixed state than their great master (and, as some would have it, fellow-worker in one play, *The Two Noble Gentlemen*). Their morality is less pure, their passion lower and more sentimental; and they are less universal than he is in the higher sense, though they perhaps appeal more to the average man. They, as well as Jonson, were much more popular than Shakespeare after the Restoration, and they even continued to be acted constantly during the eighteenth century. This was no doubt partly due to their having more vulgarly attractive subjects, treated with a great deal of purely theatrical ability. But there is splendid poetry in a large part of their work (probably in all of that with which Beaumont was concerned). Their plays are, to this day, almost always agreeable to read; and they have a peculiar grasp of everyday character, especially of light and lively, but what we may call, with allowance for the manners of the time, fairly well-bred youth of both sexes.

**Approach of decadence.**

There are some really great names still to mention, and the total number of dramatists between Shakespeare's death and the closing of the theatres (1643) is very large; but most of them must be dismissed unnamed or barely named. The two best, Massinger and Ford, were both Elizabethans proper of some standing, but the work of both was done in later reigns. In both, and in all others of this time, there appears a certain second-hand touch which is conspicuously absent from the sometimes inferior work of the earlier school. Every now and then we feel quite sure that they have actually read or heard the plays of Shakespeare and others; even when there is no special point to be identified, there is a sort of bookish flavour which occurs at other times of literary history, and always indicates an age of something like decadence. Moreover, in all but the greatest

above referred to, and even to some extent in them, there is noticeable a distinct falling off in technicalities. The redundance above mentioned, though occasionally effective, is a very dangerous licence, and particularly liable to abuse, as are also, unless they are used with great care and skill, the other licences of overlapping, shifted pause, and even trisyllabic feet. Want of skill and want of care with these will speedily make verse into mere rickety, wobbling prose. And as blank verse has not, like the broken-down stanzas of the followers of Chaucer, rhyme to keep at any rate the lines in some order, there is risk of something as bad as, or worse than, the doggerel of the fifteenth century. Now, this actually appears, not merely in the lower kind of dramatists, but in men of talent and real poets like Sir William Davenant (1606–1668) and Sir John Suckling (1609–1642). This degeneracy, though in itself merely ugly, is historically very important, for, with other things to be mentioned presently, it beyond all doubt helped to occasion the great changes which will be noticed in the next chapter.

**Bad blank verse, etc., of Davenant and others.**

Of the three dramatists referred to above, however, Philip Massinger (1583–1640), John Ford (1590?–1650?), and James Shirley (1596–1666), the first two are not much affected by this disease, while Shirley, though he shows signs of it sometimes, can get rid of it, when it pleases him to shake it off. Massinger's plays, though many of them are lost, are still numerous, and display, both in tragedy and comedy, a great deal of power. He has not the exquisite strokes of poetry which distinguish such a man as, for instance, Dekker, who actually worked with him and infused them sometimes into his comrade's work. His character-drawing is not very deep or individual; his tragedy is not heart-rending, nor his comedy delicately humorous. But *The*

**Massinger, Ford, and Shirley.**

*Virgin Martyr*, which he wrote with Dekker, is charming, and several others, *The Roman Actor*, for instance, are stately and imposing tragedies, while *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* is one of the most powerful comedies or tragi-comedies of manners in English.

Ford, on the other hand, has not left us much independent work, and a good deal of what he wrote, alone or with others, is lost. The somewhat morbid tone which we perceive in all this school and time exaggerates itself in him to the highest, indeed in his two best plays to an unnatural pitch, but he is able to carry his readers with him by the intensity of his passion and pathos. He has left us, too, a historical play, *Perkin Warbeck*, which, though somewhat stiff and statuesque, is probably the best thing of the kind out of Shakespeare. He exhibits, in a fashion somewhat redeemed by his genius, the relapse towards the horror-tragedy, which is noticeable now, and which others display without the assistance of that redeeming quality.

Shirley, again, a very voluminous dramatist, the author of about forty plays, masques, etc., and, as has been said, the latest-lived of the whole group, is more like a weaker Beaumont-and-Fletcher in a single person than either Ford or Massinger. Indeed, to some extent his work "throws back" to things much earlier than the twin dramatists, for we have from him an actual morality, *Honour and Riches*, with a more fully dramatised version, *Honoria and Mammon*. It is in Shirley, in short, that the bookish or literary tendency, the signs of a regular "school" of drama, appear most; and as he is the most definite scholar, so he is the last of his school. But he has left us some fine plays, many interesting ones, and not a little poetry of another sort, the best known piece of which is that beginning "The glories of our blood and state."

Others must be briefly mentioned, but cannot be quite left out. Of two already named, Davenant and Suckling, the former not merely, like Shirley, outlived the Restoration and wrote after it, but, unlike Shirley, was largely instrumental (see next chapter) in introducing a new school of drama. Richard Brome (?–1652 ?), who was a "servant" (*i.e.* a sort of secretary or page) to Ben Jonson, followed his master's manner to some extent, with less genius and learning, but with more lightness and stage-knowledge, in a dozen lively comedies, the chief of them *The Northern Lass*, in which a frequent stage device, the use of dialect, is employed. Thomas Randolph (1605–1635), who stood to Ben in the more honourable relation of "son,"[1] and died young, left some dramas of a strongly academic cast, and not so actable as Brome's, but of not a little literary value. No others, perhaps, deserve actual mention here; but there were many, and we possess a considerable number of anonymous plays, some of them of very great merit, and showing the extraordinary diffusion of the dramatic impulse at the time. Nor should we omit the curious body of "Shakespearian Doubtfuls," as they are called, or plays attributed to Shakespeare. There are some seventeen in all, but in most of them he pretty certainly had no hand, and none of them was included in the original[2] edition of his works. The most strictly noteworthy of these are *Edward III.* and *Arden of Feversham*, besides the above-mentioned *Two Noble Gentlemen*, which is undoubtedly in part or in whole by Beaumont and Fletcher. *Edward III.* is

[1] Not a few of the younger men of letters of the time called themselves Jonson's "sons."

[2] In a later folio (the third) some were admitted, and one of these, *Pericles*, has held its ground. If Shakespeare did not write the whole of it, which is possible, it is almost impossible that any one else should have written some parts.

like Shakespeare in versification, *Arden of Feversham* in grasp of character; but neither in other ways, especially in choice of subject.

**Non-dramatic poetry.**

In non-dramatic poetry the period is still more distinguished than in dramatic, even if we take Milton out as standing by himself; but that "school-character" which has just been noted in the drama is also, and even more, visible here. The main school-influences are three, those of Spenser, Jonson, and Donne (see below); but they are broken into by certain others, especially of a technical kind, to which it is very important that attention should be paid.

**Drayton, Daniel, Fairfax**

The longer poems of the first quarter of the seventeenth century, from Spenser's death to the reign of Charles I., are much influenced by *The Faerie Queene*, but only in two important cases are they allegorical. Drayton and Daniel continued their work during this period, and we learn from Drayton[1] that a distaste for stanzas was setting in, and a return to the decasyllabic couplet—a form not very much used since Chaucer's time. It was, however, noted here (see above, p. 37) that in Chaucer's verse itself two different kinds of this couplet show themselves, one more or less confining the sense and sound to the couplet itself, the other allowing both to run on and over. By a very curious repetition of circumstances, the stopped form seems to have been propagated just in the same way again (see above, p. 37) as that in which Chaucer had, to all appearance, first conceived it. *He* had written over a thousand of such couplets as terminations to the rhyme-royal or seven-lined stanzas of *Troilus*. Now just after Spenser's death there appeared (as was briefly mentioned above) a translation

[1] Not only is there this intimation, but to complete it we have from Sir John Beaumont, elder brother of Francis the dramatist, an enthusiastic recommendation of the stopped couplet itself.

of Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* by Edward Fairfax. It was written, not in Spenserian stanzas (though the influence of Spenser was strong on it) nor in rhyme-royal, but in the octave or eight-line stanza of the Italians, which also ends in a couplet. These couplets tended to isolate themselves from the six earlier verses, just as the last two lines of the Shakespearian sonnet do; and the sound seems to have been pleasing to the people. Drayton himself wrote many of his later poems in such couplets, arranged continuously, though he used other metres, especially the Alexandrine, in his great description of England, the *Polyolbion*. But this verse is not good in English for a continuance.

**W. Browne, Wither, and the "Heroic" Romancers.**

Still, as we have seen, as this century went on, a great tendency to relax verse, to make it easier to write and more flowing to read, set in, and this attacked not merely the blank verse of drama, but the couplet of narrative and other non-dramatic verse. People began to run on their couplets, both octosyllabic (which also was written much at this time) and decasyllabic. If carefully done, this can be very agreeable, and it was so in the verse of William Browne (1591–1643) and George Wither (1588–1667), both strongly Spenserian in some ways, though not in stanza. But, as in blank verse, this ease and fluency tended towards looseness and neglect, so that in narrative poets of the times of Charles I., when a kind of verse-romance came to be rather largely written, though the verse never becomes as harsh and doggerellish as that of the fifteenth century, the sentences begin to be of quite disproportionate length, the rhymes appear almost merged in a flood of running verse, and, worst of all, the writer begins to be incoherent, observes no real connection in his thought, and allows himself to be carried on with such volubility that neither he nor his reader can be very certain of what he is talking

about. These errors appear in the work, otherwise often quite beautiful, of Shakerley Marmion (1603–1639, *Cupid and Psyche*), John Chalkhill (?—?[1], *Thealma and Clearchus*), and, above all, William Chamberlayne (1619–1689, *Pharonnida*).

Sylvester. There was still a great fancy for translation about this time, and besides Fairfax, one of the most popular poets of the time was Joshua Sylvester (1563–1618), who rendered into quaint English the poem of the French Huguenot poet Du Bartas on the Creation, with such acceptance that one may find some echoes of it in Milton himself. The allegorical poems above referred to, of the two Fletchers, Giles' (1558–1623) *Christ's Victory* and Phineas' (1582–1650) *The Purple Island*, are fine but long-winded, and written in not very happy alterations of the Spenserian stanza; while something like a relapse upon the old habit of choosing poetry as a vehicle for subjects much better treated in prose, appeared in the philosophical-religious epics, if we may call them so, of Joseph Beaumont (1616–1699, *Psyche*) and Henry More (1614–1687, *The Song of the Soul*).

Yet though there is much beautiful poetry in these long poems, it is scarcely in them that the principal poetical charm of the poetry of the first half of the seventeenth century consists. This is to be found in its lyric. With this eldest and most delightful kind of verse Spenser, as has been said, did not deal very largely. But it was also pointed out that in the dramas and pamphlets of the Elizabethan time proper, as well as in collections definitely devoted to poems of the kind, that kind was very fertile. These collections did not wholly cease, but it became more and more customary

Lyric.

[1] This poet's date is very uncertain; but he knew Spenser, who died in 1599, and Izaak Walton, who published Chalkhill's poem in 1683.

for poets to issue their own work separately. Drayton in his later years wrote very delightful lyrics: Jonson's own—such as the universally known "Drink to me only with thine eyes" (a wonderful mosaic from Greek prose, not verse)—offered a model of classical correctness and almost severity combined with romantic feeling; and there was a new, peculiar, and extremely powerful influence to which we have not yet referred except by a glance. John Donne (1573–1631) was some thirty years old at the Queen's death, and it is probable that the larger part of his lyrical work had then been written. But it had not been published; and as in later life he took orders and became famous as a preacher, no authoritative edition of it was likely. It was, however, much handed about in MS., and its powerful and strange qualities had undoubtedly much to do with the rise and popularity of what has been rather unfortunately called "metaphysical" poetry. This word was originally and properly used by Dryden, in connection with Donne and others, to denote what it strictly means, "something beyond or behind the merely natural"; but it is not certain that even Dr. Johnson, who took it up and made it popular in his *Lives of the Poets*, did not slightly confuse its meaning with the more ordinary one of "abstrusely *philosophical*," and the confusion has largely prevailed since. The poetry so called was in fact a natural outgrowth, or even a mere continuation in certain special directions, of the habit of "conceit" already noticed (see above, p. 93). Instead of expressing himself plainly or directly the poet seeks the most indirect fashion of innuendo—elaborate and at first sight incongruous similes and metaphors; complicated allusions to classical and other matters; sometimes deliberate puns or plays on a word or phrase. Moreover, Donne himself happened to possess a temperament

**Donne and "Metaphysical" poetry.**

as obvious and as remarkable as Marlowe's, though quieter and deeper—a mixture of intense passion, deep melancholy, and a tendency to meditations "remote and afar" from the ostensible subject. All this, as well as, in another department of it, the strong satiric temper which he likewise possessed, showed itself in his poems; and, finding a large number of kindred spirits in the younger poets of the day, it produced, by contagion and imitation, the great body of frequently exquisite lyric verse which is also collectively known as "Caroline," and sometimes (with considerable but not entire justice) "Cavalier."

Cowley, Carew, Herrick, and Waller.

A chapter at least would be required to give separate notices of only a few lines to this large body of poets. Their great peculiarity is that though many, in fact most, of them are justly classed as "minor" poets, there is hardly one in whom you may not and do not find passages worthy of a poet of the very first class. Of the four most generally known, Abraham Cowley (1618–1667) was a writer of long poems (such as the *Davideis*) as well as short, and the introducer of a peculiar kind of verse called "Pindaric," an irregular imitation of the Greek poet's "strophic" forms, which became rather unfortunately popular. But he wrote also a vast number of small pieces of the kind with which we are now dealing, "metaphysical" enough in the sense of conceit, but wanting the finest and strangest flavour of Donne's verse. Thomas Carew (1598 ?–1639), a courtier, one of Ben Jonson's "sons," and a fervid admirer of Donne, has left us very little verse, but some of it is quite exquisite. Robert Herrick (1591–1674), the least known in his own time and for long after, has been for a century the most popular of all; deserving this by the variety, daintiness, and fresh country feeling of his profane poems, and the singularly contrasted quality of some of

his sacred ones. Edmund Waller (1606–1687), the last of the four, has most of the characteristics of the next age mixed with some of this—"smooth" verse (see next chapter), including a good deal of couplet in longer poems, and light, sparkling, but rather thin and shallow lyrics.

**Crashaw, Herbert, and Vaughan.**

Next to this group for notoriety may be placed the religious poets—Richard Crashaw (1613?–1649, one of the most extravagant but also one of the most poetical of the metaphysicals), George Herbert (1593–1633, a more sober but still fanciful author of poems (*The Temple*), which, with Keble's *Christian Year*, are the most characteristic of all Anglican verse), and Henry Vaughan (1622–1695, who can rise higher than Herbert and be almost quainter than Crashaw, but is more unequal than either)—and the courtiers and amatory writers Suckling and Richard Lovelace (1618–1658), the latter author of few but charming serious things, and the former a light poet of hardly surpassed grace. Beyond these none can be said to be familiar to the ordinary reader, but it would be easy, if it were likely to be of any use here, to enumerate literally dozens of verse-writers, who, it may be, have done nothing exactly great, whose poetry as a whole has the characteristics of a school rather than those of an individual, and yet among whose work you can, as was said above, be pretty sure of finding something for the like of which you may look in vain before 1580 and[1] between 1660 and 1798—something which contains the appealing thought, the original expression, the soft or grave musical sound, and sometimes the vivid picture to the eye which together make up true poetry.

**Suckling, Lovelace, and others.**

Contemporary with all those as yet mentioned in this chapter, though slightly younger than most of them,

[1] Except in the work of Blake.

was the poet who is commonly ranked as second only to Shakespeare, John Milton (1608–1674). Different as Milton was from most of these contemporaries, and sharply contemptuous as he was of some of them, he did not disdain to learn a good deal from them and their forerunners, and in all the poems which he wrote before he turned to politics the chief difference between him and them is that he is better. Even this advantageous distinction does not appear at once, for his boyish poems are not nearly so good as those of some others, and it was not till his "three and twentieth year" (commemorated in a sonnet), and hardly even then, that he showed what he could do. For the next seven years (till 1637) he wrote not much but consummately; then he was silent in poetry for more than twenty, except for a few sonnets, and only in the last years of his life did he produce his chief poems in point of bulk and importance of form—*Paradise Lost* (1667), *Paradise Regained* (1671), *Samson Agonistes* (1671). Yet what he had written earlier would have been almost enough for a first-class poet. His *Ode on the Nativity* combined religious enthusiasm of the highest kind, with stateliness greater even than Spenser's (whose pupil Milton allowed himself to be), classical knowledge wider and better utilised than Jonson's, a command of pure poetic sound equal to the greatest things of Donne and much more constant, with something borrowed from Italian, of which language he was a great student, and which infused softness and harmony. His Italian studies were also possibly responsible for his taking up the sonnet (which, after the great outburst at the end of Elizabeth's reign, had not been very popular in England) and employing it in a form nearer to Italian practice. The two charming pieces *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* were Italian in their titles, but in metre (the mixed

Milton.

His minor poems.

octosyllabic and heptasyllabic couplet of Shakespeare, Fletcher, Browne, and others), scenery, and temper quite English. Some beautiful fragments of a masque character (*Arcades*) were followed by a complete and exquisite masque (as Milton himself termed it, but more like a regular lyrical drama), to which the name of *Comus* has been given later; and this was in its turn succeeded by the great elegy of *Lycidas*, in which competent judges have seen one of the most unique achievements of English poetry. All these were written between 1630 and 1637.

*Paradise Lost*, etc.

When, as has been said, many years later, and after the Civil War, Milton resumed poetical work, it was not to minor poems that he devoted himself, but to the great epics and the sacred tragedy.[1] In all three he displayed, with an increase of majestic thought and expression, the almost unsurpassed command of versification and diction by which he is distinguished. In *Comus* he had already used blank verse with great success, but without keeping quite to one style; he now elaborated a style of his own in this metre, which has influenced every writer of it in English since. Probably in a fit of temper, he not merely abandoned but abused rhyme here; but he returned to it afterwards in the "choruses" of *Samson Agonistes*. From first to last Milton, not merely by the greatness of his themes and thought, which are peculiar to himself and cannot be repeated, but by a mastery of versification (his diction, though magnificent in itself, was easily, and indeed generally has been caricatured by injudicious followers) which practically completed the education, as we may call it, of English poetry. We saw that after Spenser had put things in the right way

[1] He had in his youth planned a very large number of such tragedies, as well as some from profane histories, and among these were the subjects of his great epic itself.

as to rhymed stanzas, and after Shakespeare had achieved perfection in dramatic blank verse, disorder and laxity had set in. These faults Milton corrected (and corrected "for good," as we say, so long as any one chooses to go to him) in a surprising variety of metres. *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso*, the *Arcades* fragments, and the later part of *Comus* display the mixed eight and seven syllable line, which constitutes the octosyllabic couplet, with a mixture of ease and accuracy not to be surpassed; *Lycidas* is, almost by itself, an object lesson in prosody, from the extraordinary skill with which lines of different length, rhymed as it seems at first irregularly or even left without any rhyme at all, compose a complete symphony in verse, and make as it were their own musical accompaniment. The varied metres (some very audaciously devised) of *Samson Agonistes*, fine as they are, require careful study thoroughly to appreciate them.

**Importance of his verse.**

But it is in the blank verse of *Paradise Lost*, for which that of *Comus* is a kind of exercise, like *The Shepherd's Kalendar* for *The Faerie Queene*, that the great subject of study for the student of English literature lies. In it Milton achieved the *ne plus ultra*, in at least one direction, of metrical composition. By combining his lines through variation of pause and overlapping of sense into verse-paragraphs, he attained at once the effect of blank verse, of couplet, and of stanza; by maintaining steadily the grammatical and rhetorical interdependence of these paragraphs in a clear order, he avoided the incoherence, amounting in some cases to sheer unintelligibleness, of his couplet contemporaries (see above, p. 109). But his arrangement of the individual line is the most extraordinary thing. He allows himself large license of substituted feet, both disyllabic and trisyllabic, and so, with his variety of pause, avoids monotony to the greatest possible extent. But he never

by any chance lets the line get out of order, or permits it to lose its cadence or shape. With him and with Shakespeare in hand, carefully studied and thoroughly understood, all secrets of English versification are open to the student. And he will find, the more he considers the unsurpassed, almost unapproached magnificence of the thought and imagery, the characters and the stories which these poets have given us, how enormously the gift is enhanced by the methods of giving.

Despite, however, the great achievements of this first half of the seventeenth century in drama and in poetry, it may be questioned whether it is not, when compared with other periods, most remarkable for its developments of prose. Even Milton owes something of his great position as a man of letters to his prose-writing, and that of the period as a whole stands, in reference to the preceding, in a much higher position in this respect than in the other. It has been pointed out how hard it is to disengage even the work of the latest sixteenth century from that of its successors, both in poetry and in drama; while if the disengagement could be effected, all sorts of curious but rather idle allowances and calculations would have to be made before any one could weigh the results against each other.

**Peculiar eminence of prose at this time.**

But the case of prose is quite different. We gave all due credit to Lyly and to Hooker for the advances they made and the patterns they set. But direct following of Lyly could only be mischievous, though his general purpose of adornment was creditable, and the style of Hooker, admirable and beautiful, placid and reconciling, as it is, was certainly fit only for a few subjects, perhaps only for its own special purpose of theological argument. Moreover, not only in Lyly's but in others, ultra-"conceit," exaggerated quaintness, and other

faults appear. Even Bacon's early Essays were, as we saw, crushed and squeezed together so as to make rather a collection of somewhat rugged prose epigrams than a flowing rhythmical discourse.

In his later ones, indeed, and in other work representative of the reigns of James and Charles, he eased, smoothed, and graced his style not a little, although it never attained the beauty which was to distinguish the best writers of the second quarter of the century. Foretastes of that beauty were, however, given by other Elizabethans proper, such as Raleigh (in whose great and unequal *History of the World* some passages of extraordinary beauty appear), and Fulke Greville (Sidney's friend, biographer, and superior in prose-writing though not in verse), but above all by Donne, whose sermons (all the work of his later life) display the qualities noticed in his verse, with almost incredible results of beauty, in prose which is quite genuine prose and does not imitate verse in any undue measure. And as time went on, new writers of still greater power disclosed themselves, all, however, forming, more or less, on this side or on that, a curious division, something of which has been already indicated as regards Lyly and Hooker themselves, but which emphasised itself as the history proceeded after a fashion parallel, though much more marked, to something which has been noticed in the poetry.

Its character.

Elizabethan quaintness, Jacobean learning (the King's own pretensions to this were well founded, if those to wisdom were not, and his subjects followed him), as well as the melancholy musical meditation which distinguishes the Caroline period, were all wrought together, one being more prominent at one time and another at another, in a band of great writers who, though some obvious faults may be pointed out in most of them, have never been, and it is safe to say never

will be, surpassed as masters and almost magicians in English prose.[1]

The most Elizabethan of these in quaintness, though his very title shows the presence of a later spirit, is Robert Burton (1577–1640), author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), a book which, ever since its appearance, has been the delight, perhaps not of very many, but of most of the fittest readers. Although it has often been at least partially imitated since, it is difficult to think of the book as having been genuinely and spontaneously conceived at any other time than this. It is, in method and ostensible arrangement, the most orderly and scientific of treatises, the causes, symptoms, and possible cures of the disease with which it deals being most logically mapped out under heads and sub-heads. But this is in reality only an outline or skeleton, upon which or within which are imposed the most intricate and multiform digressions, largely composed of endless quotations on the subject, or things connected with it, from ancient and modern writers (Burton knows and quotes the great dramatists of his own time), sometimes translated as well as given in the original, and heaped together in strange breathless sentences occasionally showing no regular syntax whatever. Yet Burton can, when he pleases, write regularly and exceedingly well, in a style of the plainer kind, but full of humour and feeling. Burton.

Undoubtedly, however, he allows quaintness to get a little the better of him ; and this is also the case with a younger writer, some of whose work is rather like Burton's, but who devoted himself more—for they were both in orders—to the special business of his profession.

[1] Jonson's great influence made, in prose, for a style less beautiful than theirs, but closer, though not unduly close like Bacon's, plainer, and more suited to business purposes.

Fuller. Thomas Fuller's (1608–1661) wit was highly praised by Coleridge, and very popular in his own earlier time, though it was attacked after the great change in prose (see next chapter) at the Restoration. It is perhaps sometimes out of place in his sermons, though scarcely in his miscellaneous works, or even in his *Church History*. But there is a certain childishness in him which puts him far below Burton, while as a writer he cannot touch the great group which follows, and of each of whose members we must say a little—Hobbes, Clarendon, Milton, Taylor, and Browne.

With the exception of Hobbes (who was born in the year of the Armada, but wrote or published nothing in English till he had reached middle age, and did not die till 1679), all these were post-Elizabethan in the strict sense. But, as is common with such groups, they were born pretty close together—Browne in 1605, Milton and Clarendon in 1608, and Taylor, the youngest, in 1613. They illustrate those diverging types of prose of which we have spoken, Milton, Taylor, and Browne representing the ornate style, which they were to carry to a pitch the utmost possible at the time, and indeed were to see superseded; Clarendon and Hobbes the plainer, which was to survive them and indeed to establish itself as the common standard style of English, for ordinary purposes, during a period which does not seem to have closed yet.

Milton. It is a common saying, and a fairly true one, that good poets are usually good prose-writers, but it is only very partially true of Milton. He is one of the greatest of poets, and he has written some of the greatest of prose sentences, but hardly any even of these is quite free from blots and flaws, and his *general* prose style is only tolerable because there is always a chance of coming upon these nuggets. It is curious that he,

who in verse can write sentences twenty lines long and more with perfect grammatical clearness, in prose gets into the most inextricable tangles of clauses. He Latinises far too much, as is indeed not quite surprising in a man who was writing Latin for official purposes more frequently than English, and he forgets that Latin constructions will not always do in our tongue. So that, though he is in his own way one of our greatest masters of ornate style, he shows the defects of that style and way. It is unfortunate, doubtless, that most of his prose work is political, and written in a state of violent partisan temper. His most famous work, the *Areopagitica* (an address to Parliament against censorship of the press), has some of this, but not much; and his curious and interesting, but avowedly not critical, little *Histories* (of England in early times and of Muscovy) hardly any at all. But these latter do not give opportunity for the grander outbursts of his pamphlets and of the *Areopagitica* itself.

Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667), a clergyman, and later a bishop, was, with Donne, the greatest of a great band of divines who, about this period, made the pulpit the means of enriching English prose with matter which, unlike most oratory, was really literature. Some, including distinguished judges like Coleridge and De Quincey, have thought him the greatest of all our prose-writers, but this is hardly the case. He is undoubtedly one of our greatest masters of ornate prose, but he rather overdid the ornament. Elaborate similes, introduced by the same monotonous phrase, "So have I seen," become tiresome after a time, however pretty they may be individually. Length and complication of sentence, the great drawbacks of the period, constantly mar his composition. But his skill in making prose musical was almost supreme; and for those who consider

Taylor.

sweetness the chief thing to be aimed at, he is easily first.

Sir Thomas Browne.

Sir Thomas Browne (1605–1682), the eldest of this trio, is also the greatest. He was a physician, and for his time a considerable man of science; but he was also a scholar and man of letters of the finest kind. His *Vulgar Errors* (1646), his longest work, is not only extremely learned, but positively amusing in its collection and cool criticism of eccentric popular beliefs of the time in natural history. His earlier *Religio Medici* (1642), a defence of reasoned orthodoxy; his *Urn Burial* (1658) and *Garden of Cyrus*, in places too fanciful, but magnificently worded discourses, somewhat in the manner of Burton; and his unfinished and uncorrected *Christian Morals* represent, with some slight faults and drawbacks, the highest point yet reached by our tongue in prose. Browne has been wrongly charged with defects in grammar, for English grammar is only an induction from great English writers, of whom he is one of the greatest, and there were no authoritative rules of it in his time, whatever there may have been since. He has been with more justice accused—and he had practically invited the accusation himself—of over-Latinising. It is quite true, not only that he Anglicises Latin words in an unusual fashion, but that he uses these and better known ones in senses which, without some knowledge of Latin or Greek, nobody is likely to understand. But readers then, though less numerous, were more thoroughly educated than they are to-day; and Browne is not to be blamed for not writing to an audience which he did not contemplate, and which indeed did not exist.

Hobbes and Clarendon.

The other two writers who have been mentioned, Clarendon (Edward Hyde, Earl of, 1608–1674), and Thomas Hobbes, were of a different and plainer school, and were almost obliged to be so by their subjects.

Clarendon (*History of the Rebellion*, written late) was in literature a political historian, as in life he was an active statesman. Hobbes (*Leviathan*) was a philosopher, and one whose special object was to strip philosophy of any "glamour" of words, to give these latter the sharpest and most clearly defined meanings, and to avoid abstractions, metaphors, and the like as much as possible. Nevertheless he is a very great writer indeed; one of our greatest in the argumentative way. For though his premisses are often arbitrary and mistaken, and his attempt to treat language as if it were a set mathematical symbol, a worse mistake still, yet his clearness, force, and occasional eloquence of expression can hardly be overpraised. He manages his sentences and paragraphs perfectly: there is scarcely any contemporary writer who surpasses him in this respect, though Browne has a great advantage in it over Taylor, Milton, and others.

On the other hand, Clarendon, with many gifts, fails in this very particular. His sentences are sometimes monstrous, a single one filling a large page; and though this is occasionally due to mere clumsy punctuation, or lack of punctuation, it is by no means always so. But he can describe admirably; and (partly taking pattern, it may be, from French) he is almost the first English writer to give vividly drawn characters of persons. Florid prose of the other kind would never have done for this, and accordingly he does not use it; but he is, though he came after Knollys and Raleigh, in a more complete sense than either, the first and one of the greatest of our historians from the combined historical and literary point of view.

**The Authorised Version of the Bible.**

Nor must we omit—indeed there is nothing of greater importance—the Authorised Version of the Bible, which was published in 1611, but had been in preparation for

some years before. This translation was, of course, based to a large extent upon earlier ones, which had been produced for the best part of a century, but it far exceeds them all in beauty and standard quality of English. Like that of Spenser's verse, its language was not exactly that of its own or any time. But there was no reason why it should be; and the importance of the substance, the special attention to it which was soon afterwards drawn by the political and ecclesiastical conditions of the time, its abiding currency, and its intrinsic merits, gave it an influence on succeeding writers, both in prose and verse, to which there is probably no parallel. And we could perhaps have no more decisive evidence of the extraordinary diffusion of literary power during this period than the composition of such a work at the very middle of it. For it must be remembered that the translators of the Bible were a considerable body, nearly fifty in number, and that among them not a single writer who has done other literary work of the highest or even a very high class was included. They selected and improved upon the work of their predecessors; they performed and polished their own; and they arranged (a most difficult thing to do) this compound of new and old into one artistic whole, with an unerringness which could only arise from the presence of a great literary "atmosphere"—of a diffused power of literary production and appreciation among educated folk at large.

**Weak points in Elizabethan literature.**

Thus, whether we look at the whole production of the larger Elizabethan period (for we must here take the contents of these two chapters together for survey), or whether we look only at such things as *The Faerie Queene*, as Shakespeare's works, as the Authorised Version, as the prose masterpieces of Browne, and the poems of Milton—adding to them the innumerable

achievements of those "minor" writers in this time whom the "majors" of other times have not equalled at their greatest—it may seem impossible to value or to praise it too highly. And in truth, if the abundance and the consummateness of the best things are taken together, there probably is no period that surpasses, if there is any that equals it. But a critical estimate, while not abating one jot of this admiration, will admit at once that it was not a perfect period by any means, and will add, if any one objects "What period is?" that its imperfections were of a kind almost as dangerous as its qualities were splendid and charming. In the first place, to borrow a striking remark of a great French writer[1] about himself, "If the Elizabethans had not genius, it was all up with them." Genius can transcend rule; but you cannot always count on genius, and that which is not genius cannot do without some rule. We have plentiful examples of this, from the earlier "Horror" plays to the minor metaphysical poets. It took but a very little to make tragedy into a mess of bombastic phrase, unnatural action, and horrors which themselves become merely ludicrous. Comedy was in equal danger of becoming coarse, trivial, and tiresome. The "vaulting ambition" of the poetry too often overleapt itself; the conceits became puerile. Above all, the regular technical machinery of diction and versification was still so unsettled that it was constantly coming to pieces.

**The change to which they led.**

As a result of these defects, English was still unprovided with the means and methods of ordinary literary work. This is a matter which does not concern poetry, for that has nothing to do with the ordinary, and is not wanted at all unless it is extraordinary. But all the energy and all the achievement of these two generations had not succeeded in producing, if indeed any one had

[1] The novelist Balzac.

tried to produce, a straightforward prose style, suitable for the business uses of everyday life, which prose is more specially bound to subserve. There could be nothing more splendid than the great ornate prose of Donne, Raleigh, Browne, Taylor, and Milton (at his best). But such prose could only be in place in certain departments of literature, and not always there. Even in a writer like Clarendon, who was not always anxious to achieve very important rhetorical effects, inexperience in what may be called the mechanical part of writing was still prominent. To select, for the most part at any rate, language which most people could understand; to arrange it clearly in sentences of orderly construction and moderate if varied length; to look first of all at the purpose—explanation, information, conviction, or whatever it might be—and not at the composition of a beautiful piece of writing, these were things which still required to be learnt. It was impossible that there should not be some disappearance or suspension of the finest results while the process of learning was going on; and this was a great loss. But there was also some gain, and this gain remained to the credit of the language and the literature even when a new stage more like the Elizabethan had in turn opened. The space between these was again a long one—nearly a century and a half. What it was, and what it did, we must now attempt to see.

The Library a little before 1660.

If we suppose a man about the close of the great Civil War and before the Restoration, disgusted with public affairs and retiring to his library, it may not be uninteresting to see what accessions might have been made to it, if his father and himself had done their duty, since the beginning of the century. There would not have been such a contrast as that father would have enjoyed in comparison with his own ancestors at the time of our last survey, nor would there be any very striking general difference of spirit and character, except to an exceedingly

acute and rather "foresighted" or "second-sighted" critic. But the bulk would have increased vastly, and while in some departments there would be a distinct falling off, in others there would be a great advance. Hundreds of plays, including the latest and most of the greatest works of Shakespeare, nearly the whole of Jonson, much of Shakespeare's other contemporaries, and the whole of Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, Ford, Shirley, and scores of minors, would now fill the shelves, though the critical reader would notice a sad falling off (as to some formal points) in the latest additions. The bookcases devoted to poetry would be in much the same case. He would find indeed no second *Faerie Queene*; and however much private information he might have about literary matters, it is not certain that he would have found out that *Paradise Lost* was even in preparation, though it may have been. But a little short of this level the ranges of long poems of merit were largely extended to receive the later work of Drayton and Daniel, the quaint and popular paraphrases of Sylvester, the Spenserian allegories of the Fletchers, and the philosophical poems of Joseph Beaumont and More. If he found (as he easily might) these latter rather tough reading, there was an entirely new body of "heroic" romance in verse, the work of Chalkhill and Marmion and many others, leading up to the best of all, *Pharonnida*, published just (1659) about the time we are supposing. Above all he could, if he cared for it, revel in poetry on a smaller scale, both directly lyrical and of other kinds. Hundreds and almost thousands of charming pieces from Campion and Jonson and Drayton to Milton's own minor work (complete by this time) and the whole flock of Caroline poets were at his disposal.

Yet, bountiful as the Muses of verse and drama had been, it may almost be said that in actual comparison the greatest enrichment of the library was in prose; for Shakespeare and other poets had been common to it at both stages. Against Hooker, almost alone in 1600, many writers, combining charm of manner and importance of bulk and matter, were now to be set. There was not indeed yet any great prose fiction (though a few English writers were trying not merely to translate), only very rudimentary newspapers, and, except in Ben Jonson's case, a positive break-off of that criticism which in the Elizabethan time had looked so promising. But Bacon had largely increased and improved his *Essays*, and had followed them up with *The Advancement of Learning* and other things in English,

though he still clung rather nervously to Latin. Jonson himself had left not much but fine prose in a strong, plain style, which was full of future. The unique eccentricity of Burton's *Anatomy* must have been read and re-read by any lover of literature; while he had in the miscellaneous works of Browne, in the sermons of Donne and Taylor and others, in the nobler and less perturbed passages of Milton's pamphlets, and in many other places prose which, almost for the first time, could give the actual pleasure of poetry a little altered—the pleasure of literature itself, apart from its subject. For less serious and intense enjoyment there began to be written books like Walton's *Angler*, Howell's *Letters*, Cowley's *Essays* (to be noticed again)—things readable and re-readable simply for amusement and pastime. Lastly, there had been available for nearly fifty years the unsurpassed and unmatched union of the greatest matter with the most admirable form in the Authorised Version of the Scriptures. The time indeed was the full harvest-tide of what has been called the larger Elizabethan characteristics, and almost all their fruits could be gathered in by those who chose.



# CHAPTER VI

## THE AUGUSTAN OR NEO-CLASSIC PERIOD, 1660–1798

Peculiar character of the change at the Restoration—Names given to it—Its causes, and their workings—The first group of Restoration writers—Dryden, his verse—His dramas—His prose—His cardinal importance—Defects and merits of the new dispensation—Other poets and poems: *Hudibras*—Other dramatists: "Restoration" comedy—Tragedy: Otway and Lee—Prose contemporaries of Dryden: Temple and others—Degradation of the plain style—The rescue by Addison, Steele, and Swift—Their action in the periodical—L'Estrange and Defoe, *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, etc.—Swift's other works—Effects of the Addisonian periodical—The second stage of Augustan poetry: Pope—His curious imitableness—Other poets: Prior, Gay, Young, etc., and others still, of a different school—Thomson and blank verse—Lighter verse—Gray, Collins, Shenstone, etc.—Symptoms of change about 1760: *Ossian*, Percy's *Reliques*, etc.—The growth of the novel—Defoe again—Swift again—The complete novel: Richardson—Fielding—Smollett, and Sterne—Great outburst of minor novel-writing—Johnson—His society: Goldsmith and others—The heralds of a new change: Cowper, Crabbe, Burns, and Blake—The Library a little before 1800.

THE change which came over English Literature at or about the Restoration is like nothing that we have seen hitherto, and not quite like anything (even the reaction from it which will put an end to this chapter) that will be seen later. That literature, since its beginning, had, as even this slight survey of it will have shown, undergone wide and deep alterations of character. But these changes had never been rapid; they had seldom if ever

**Peculiar character of the change at the Restoration.**

been what may be called deliberate; and they had, to a very large extent, been dependent on other changes in the language itself, to which there was nothing here to correspond in the very least degree. The revolution now to be discussed was deliberate; it rather affected the language than was affected by it; and it was extraordinarily rapid. Of course the whole face of the literature was not changed at once; that could not possibly happen unless a Black Death in the natural order of things, or some humanly caused process of extermination like Alva's government in the Netherlands, or the French Revolution, had destroyed every writer over the age of thirty. What are commonly considered Milton's greatest works were published, and some of them certainly produced, *after* the Restoration; Sir Thomas Browne, if he published nothing, lived for nearly a quarter of a century later; Shirley, Fuller, Taylor, Waller lived and wrote for shorter periods; Vaughan nearly, and one or two minor poets like Sir Edward Sherburne quite, reached the eighteenth century. But almost if not quite every writer under thirty after this date uses a perfectly different style, and exhibits a sharply contrasted manner of thinking. Moreover, things were written showing that this was not merely a chance difference of view, which had stolen upon people without their knowing it, but a conscious and planned revolution.

**Names given to it.**

To this great change and its results more than one different name has been given; and a very great deal of discussion has taken place about its causes and circumstances. The period which followed it and exhibited its principles has been called the "Augustan," the "Neo-classic," or even the "Gallo-classic" period, as well as by more periphrastic terms "The Age of Prose and Sense," etc., etc. Of these "Gallo-classic" should

be on no account adopted, for it is an ugly and bastard word, and it implies, as will be shown presently, a dangerously wrong conception of the movement. "Augustan" is elegant, traditional, and unobjectionable provided it is used only as a "ticket." It arose from the fact that the Augustan period of Latin was thought the best, and from the innocent self-conceit (almost all periods are innocently self-conceited, though they seldom know it) of the eighteenth century, which thought itself superior to "the last age," the age of "false wit," and so forth. The Emperor Augustus, too, had been complimented on having "found Rome brick and left it marble," a compliment which Dr. Samuel Johnson transferred to Dryden, the great inaugurator of *this* "Augustan" age in literary application. Used as thus meant, it may seem ridiculous now; but there is not much harm in it if the circumstances, as just explained, are well understood. Yet "Neo-classic," though again a hybrid word, is perhaps the most exact and the most likely to keep off error. For it indicates, as will be shown, the general attitude of the time pretty accurately, and it distinguishes that time as hardly anything else can from the various "Romantic" periods before and after itself, and from the Renaissance, when people despised vernaculars altogether, and thought that all real literature should be written in actual Greek or Latin.

But what brought this age of literature and its characteristics about? An answer which was long popular, which was formulated with splendid rhetoric if not poetry, in a famous but utterly erroneous passage of Pope, and which almost originated the epithet "Gallo-classic" above mentioned, assigned it to "French influence." Now, as Tennyson has said,

> A lie that is half a truth is ever the worst of lies.

In this particular case the answer is not so much as half or even a quarter true; but there is just enough truth in it to make it dangerous. In its foolishest and falsest form it used to be put somewhat thus: "King Charles II. and several cavaliers were exiled in France during the Commonwealth; and during that time there was some fine French literature. King Charles and his cavaliers took a fancy to this fine French literature. So when they came home they said, 'Let us have something like this fine French literature.' And then they went and did it." Now all this, except the last statement, or the inference from it, is true enough, but the connection between the various preliminary statements and the conclusion simply does not exist. King Charles and his cavaliers could not have done anything of the kind, for you cannot change the fashion of a literature as you can change that of a hat or a wig or an upper or nether garment. Only a very little of the new English literature is an imitation of French, and the most direct instance of that imitation—the introduction of rhymed verse in plays—lasted, as a popular fashion, but a very few years. The explanation, in short, is totally inadequate. The thing was due to far deeper and wider causes, which would have worked had French literature been at the time in as great a state of prostration as German was, and to which any effect that French literature had was scarcely more than that of the fly on the wheel.

Its causes

Of these causes the greatest of all was, no doubt, that mysterious need of change which betrays itself in all human affairs, which exerts itself at irregular intervals, but which always recurs—that need which the poet just quoted has said to be implanted

> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world,

and which his greatest contemporary has dealt with as the law whereby

> man is hurled
> From change to change unceasingly,
> His soul's wings never furled.

The great Elizabethan age had done greatly and more than greatly; but it was time for it to go. And it had actually to some extent, as we have seen, approached "corruption." The extravagant conceits of Cleveland,[1] the broken verse of Suckling and Davenant, the incoherent periods of Chamberlayne and others in verse, of almost all, including even the sober Clarendon, in prose —all these things and others needed correction. But there were other causes still. Such an age of excitement and enthusiasm could not last indefinitely, and the sordid collapse of institutions, manners, religion in the Commonwealth helped the degradation of letters. Wars of national enthusiasm—even sometimes of sheer national jealousy—exalt the nation's spirit; but wars of mere ecclesiastical or political partisanship always degrade it. In the English civil strife, chivalry, fidelity, sincerity, morality, and other good things had sunk; and the "lofty, insolent, and passionate" spirit which animated and was expressed by the writing of men from Spenser and Raleigh down to Lovelace and Montrose —which was found even on the other side in such men as Milton and Marvell[2]—gave way to a mere desire to make the best of things and to mind your own business.

The first of these causes—the disappearance of enthusiastic and romantic temper—was certain to have an — and their workings.

[1] John Cleveland (1613–1658), an extremely vigorous political poet on the Royalist side, also wrote miscellaneous pieces in the "metaphysical" style, which have become a sort of byword.

[2] Andrew Marvell (1621–1678), a friend of Milton, in his youth a poet of singular charm and dignity in different styles, later a sharp satirist and an independent member of Parliament.

effect upon the substance of poetry; and the second—the rise of the business-like motive—was as certain to have an effect on prose. How these effects, positive and negative, were produced, and what followed for nearly a century and a half, will be the subject of this chapter.

When changes of this sort take place in literature it always happens that more or fewer men, destined to carry them out, are born pretty close together. The vulgar way of describing what they do is to say that they "produced" the changes. The more sensible and scholarly way is to regard them as having had the will and power to express what a much larger number of people were thinking and feeling half-consciously, and certainly without the will or power to express their thoughts and emotions. At this time there was a very remarkable group of such men, who had been born from five-and-twenty to thirty years earlier, very close to each other, and who were now of an age to take advantage of the opportunities of expression which the Restoration, and the establishment of comparative quiet in Church and State, gave them. These men were John Dryden (1631–1700), Sir William Temple (1628–1699), John Tillotson (afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, 1630–1694), Sir George Savile (afterwards Marquess of Halifax, 1633–1695), Robert South (1634–1716), Thomas Sprat (afterwards Bishop of Rochester, 1635–1713), and John Locke (1632–1704). It should be observed, and is of the greatest importance, that only one of these, Dryden, was a poet, though he was certainly a host in himself. Tillotson, South, and Sprat[1] were divines; Locke was

The first group of Restoration writers.

[1] Sprat did write *verse*; but it was not poetry. And his importance here comes entirely from his prose *History of the Royal Society* (1667), in which he directly and elaborately attacks the ornate style and recommends the plain.

a philosopher; Temple and Halifax were political and miscellaneous writers.

It is perhaps even more significant that Dryden was not merely a dramatist as well as a poet (that has always been a common conjunction) but a prose-writer as well, and one who wrote much and exercised a very great influence, perhaps the greatest of all, in prose as well as in verse. He succeeded, in fact, to something very much like the position of Ben Jonson, being not only, like him, poet, dramatist, and prose-writer at the same time, but in part of his prose work a critic, and a much greater one than Jonson. In all these capacities he deserves careful attention; for in him we may see, not only the beginning of the literary ideas of the time, but very long steps onward towards the perfecting of them.

**Dryden, his verse.**

It was most fortunate for English literature that Dryden, who did not begin to write regularly till he was approaching middle life, but who then wrote steadily for full forty years, retained a strong tincture of the older spirit and tastes alongside of the new. To accuse him of, or to credit him with, "Euphuism" is to give that word a much more honourable meaning than it deserves; but he had not a little left of the vigour, the spirit, and even of the disdain of mere rules which characterised the Elizabethans. Undoubtedly, however, his main bent was towards criticism and a reasonable regularity. When he began to write seriously he adopted the heroic couplet, and the newer—that is to say, the stopped or closed—form of it. He used in it few trisyllabic feet, if any, preferring "elision" (which, however, he conducted on the sound principle that you cannot elide what you must pronounce), and taking the license of triplets (three lines rhyming together instead of two) and Alexandrines (six feet instead of five). But he was a very skilful and wide-ranging master of metre;

writing lyrics sometimes almost of the old bewitching sort, as well as others of "Pindaric" kind, and songs in purely trisyllabic cadence, which had not a little influence. On the whole, however, his greatest instrument was the stopped heroic above mentioned, which, after practising it in miscellaneous poems and plays for some twenty years, he used in his great satires, written on the occasion of the struggles after the Popish Plot and the disputes of James II.'s reign—*Absalom and Achitophel, The Medal, MacFlecknoe, The Hind and the Panther* (1681–1687).

In Dryden's heroics English verse learnt again the precision and strength of rhythm which had been relaxed and forgotten in large parts of Caroline poetry. This firm, massive, solidly-ordered couplet-verse could at times supply a medium for very noble poetry; but it was the best possible for the purposes of satire, polemic, exposition, etc., and whether it suited its subjects or not, it admitted no tampering with metrical rule. When, long afterwards, the great and more purely poetic themes and moods were revived, it was found somewhat stiff and narrow for them: at this time it could do little or no harm, and it did much good.

His dramas.

Except, however, that it served as an exercising ground for Dryden before these greater achievements of his, the use of it in drama deserved no such praise or even excuse. Englishmen were eager for theatrical amusements after their twenty years' deprivation of them. All the old master-playwrights save Shirley were dead, and he was looked on as quite out of date; but Jonson and Beaumont and Fletcher were still played, and a new kind of comedy, with a little help from Molière and other French writers, was fashioned to some extent after theirs, and written chiefly in prose. But tragedy for a time fell under the power of rhyme—also, as has been

said, with a touch of French influence—and rhyme made a mess of it. The orderly, fastidious, and sentimental-rhetorical manner of Racine, even the less conventional and sometimes magnificent, but still declamatory method of Corneille, would have been too tame for English audiences. And though there is less blood and thunder in the "heroic" plays which Dryden and others fashioned than in the old horror-dramas, they are generally quite as unnatural and sometimes much more absurd. Dryden himself, however, was too much of a critic to approve them long, and returned to blank verse with good results. The best of his "heroic" plays is the *Conquest of Granada* (1672); of his blank verse tragedies, *All For Love* (1678), a very audacious and, considering all things, surprisingly successful attempt to rival Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra.* It is of course inferior, but for a long time it was thought equal if not better, nor can there be a more useful way of understanding the different tone of dramatic poetry, and indeed of literature generally, at the two epochs, than to read these two plays one after the other.

**His prose.**

As far as concerns the general course of English literary history, which we are trying to make clear, Dryden is of as much importance in prose as in poetry, and much more than in drama, where his comedy is not very distinguished, and his tragedy partly a mistaken experiment, partly an attempt to make sheer intellectual force do the work of poetic imagination. But in prose, as in poetry proper, he saw what not merely his own age but generations to come were fitted for and wanted, and he put them in a position to get it. Dryden's prose is indeed, from this point of view, even more remarkable than his verse; for this last had been led up to by other writers, while the prose, with a slight and very recent exception in Cowley's *Essays*, was like nothing before.

Its secrets were partly negative and partly positive. Perhaps the greatest of all was his recognition of the fact that *conversational* English was getting more fit for literary use, and his success in making it so. His style exactly carries out the Shakespearian phrase "familiar but by no means vulgar," though some of his followers made it the latter. It is not merely popular. Indeed Dryden, who was a well-educated and well-read man, if not exactly what is called a scholar, introduces a good many technical terms, and can argue quite scholastically when it suits his purpose. But he is always clear: he mixes long and short sentences with skill; he can be pointed and epigrammatic, or weighty and argumentative, as he pleases, and in this or that way he achieves effects sometimes quite startlingly modern. It is hardly possible to select a sentence from the great writers of his own earlier time, who were in some cases still contemporary with him, without its betraying their pre-Restoration quality. When Dryden, in ironical proof of Shadwell's loyalty, admits that "the wine duties rise considerably by his claret," he says what any one who had the wits to say it would have said, or would say, in no different form from the time when he set the example to the present day, and what no one except Shakespeare would have said before.

His cardinal importance.

We have dwelt on him longer than on some greater writers because of this peculiar position of his. It may almost be said that as Chaucer sums up the whole accomplishment of Middle English, so Dryden forecasts almost the whole accomplishment of his own later time with the eighteenth century added. No Dryden, no Pope and no Addison; no Dryden, Pope, and Addison (it may almost be said), no Johnson.[1] The very novel,

[1] That is, as Johnson stands. He must always have been great, and he might have been greater without them; but he would have been different.

with which he had nothing directly to do, and which was the one great and almost original work of the eighteenth century, could hardly have been perfected without the easy prose style of which he was the first master; and the very rebels against eighteenth-century conventions, of whom we shall have to speak later, often started the rebellion by a sort of relapse upon Dryden in order to revolt against Pope. He is as it were a central hinge upon which the new framework of English literature turns.

**Defects and merits of the new dispensation.**

In this new work we shall miss a great deal. No one will trouble himself about the quest of that final beauty which Marlowe's greatest passage[1] acknowledges as the perpetual but vain object of the poet. Imagination, that imagination which was assigned by Shakespeare as the very substance of which the poet is compact, and defined by him as something "bodying forth the forms of things unknown," will be expressly limited by Addison to ideas furnished by the senses, and especially sight. Enthusiasm will become a word of mild pity or sharp scorn. But there will be compensations. To "run down," as it is called, the eighteenth century is a sign of a very shallow wit, which only looks for things that are not there, and neglects to look further for those that are. We shall find, in poetry itself, much good verse of the middle kind, descriptive, argumentative, and the like; some charming lighter work; and the beginnings of better things than these. We shall indeed find very little fine drama, except a brief season of artificial comedy. But the uses of the new prose will be continuous, varied, and most interesting in history, biography, letter-writing, philosophy, and many other branches;

[1] Yet should there hover in their restless heads
One thought, one grace, one wonder at the least
Which into words no virtue can digest.

there will be the immense gain of the novel, and we shall find everywhere an atmosphere of comfort and common-sense which, though it may discontent high-flying expectations, the wise will welcome in its place and time.

Other poets and poems: *Hudibras*.

It can hardly be surprising, after what has been said, to find little that can be called poetry outside of Dryden's work during his life. A few amateurs of Charles II.'s time, Rochester (1648–1680), Sedley (1639?–1701), Dorset (1638–1706), and others, and one or two professional writers, of whom the best was the dramatist and in a way novelist Aphra Behn (1640–1689), kept up practice in lyric of a kind not far inferior to that which had distinguished the reign of his father. But there was not very much of this, and it gradually dwindled away. Hardly a line of such verse was written by any one born after the Restoration. So, too, and in an even greater degree, the famous poem which, in the first years of triumph of the royal cause, covered its adversaries with immortal ridicule—the *Hudibras* (1662-1678) of Samuel Butler (1612-1680), was, though its author satirised the metaphysical poets, a sort of metaphysical burlesque. Later still, political satire took another direction, and the value of the heroic couplet for it (*Hudibras* was in octosyllables) was demonstrated by John Oldham (1653–1683) even before Dryden wrote in this style. There was a good deal of similar verse written by Sir John Denham, Andrew Marvell (who has been mentioned above, p. 133 *note*, as a friend and fellow of Milton), and others. Some of the actual "poetry" of the time, such as the rather famous *Essay on Translated Verse* of Lord Roscommon (1633–1685), showed almost a return to the old mediaeval practice of treating any subject, however unsuitable, in verse itself; yet Roscommon was a man of taste, and even tried to imitate Milton. A great deal of very bad verse was written in the form of

the irregular Pindaric which Cowley had introduced. But it may almost be said that, with the exception of the few lyrics referred to above, no poetry proper was written during the forty years of Dryden's pre-eminence except by Dryden himself.

**Other dramatists: "Restoration" comedy.**

Although one must speak rather slightingly of the drama of this time, excepting that of Dryden and that of a group to be soon mentioned, it was, in point of bulk, a very important feature of "Restoration" literature, as the whole age of Dryden is often loosely denominated.[1] It was exceedingly popular, and was indeed almost the only kind of writing by which men could make money independently of the gifts of patrons. Even before the actual Restoration Davenant, who had some interest with Cromwell, had managed to get performed, first a sort of musical entertainment, and then a piece called the *Siege of Rhodes*, which is half an opera and half a heroic play. Both these kinds (the opera to some extent succeeding the masque) became popular, as well as the hybrid sort of comedy described above, and some strangely mishandled versions of older writers. Shakespeare, though not (as it used erroneously to be thought) neglected, was terribly travestied about this time; even Davenant, who passed for Shakespeare's own godson, and Dryden, his greatest critical admirer, taking part in this low business with a vulgarising of *The Tempest*, while a man like Thomas Shadwell, Dryden's "MacFlecknoe," could complacently boast that "he had made *Timon* into a play." The theatrical, however, if not the literary spirit of drama was still abroad. Shadwell (1642–1692) himself, though not a good writer, was a clever playwright and observer of manners, and some of his plays, *Bury*

[1] There is no harm in the name (which appropriately enough designates the *beginning* of this literature), provided that the date, some thirty years later, of its most famous comedies is not forgotten (see below).

*Fair*, *Epsom Wells*, *The Squire of Alsatia*, etc., have been drawn on by writers like Scott and Macaulay since. The nearest approaches to Molière were made by two gentlemen of the court, Sir George Etherege (1655 ?–1691, *Sir Fopling Flutter*) and William Wycherley (1640 ?–1716), especially the latter (*The Country Wife*, *The Plain Dealer*). They introduced a kind of comedy which, not very regular in plot and very irregular in morality, presented sharply if rather artificially drawn characters, more than abundantly provided with witty dialogue. Years later, and chiefly in the reign of William the Third, three other writers, William Congreve (1670–1729, the best of all), Sir John Vanbrugh (1664–1726), and George Farquhar (1678–1707), took this up and improved it into really brilliant stuff. But their neglect of decorum brought upon them, upon Dryden, and upon others, a violent attack by Jeremy Collier (1650–1726), a famous nonjuring clergyman, to which Dryden practically pleaded guilty, and against which Congreve and one or two more made very lame defences.

Tragedy: Otway and Lee.

Earlier in tragedy, John Crowne (1640 ?–1703 ?) had taken up the heroic style, but the chief tragic authors of Charles II.'s reign were Thomas Otway (1651–1685) and Nathaniel Lee (1653 ?–1692). Two of Otway's plays, *Venice Preserved* and *The Orphan*, were famous for generations, their popularity being mainly due to the pathetic parts they afforded in the heroines. Lee, a much better poet than Otway, died mad, and perhaps was at no time very sane; so that, except when he wrote with Dryden, as he did once or twice, his work is somewhat incoherent, though full of fine things. His masterpiece, *The Rival Queens*, was long as popular as Otway's. But very little of all this drama is even read now, and the comedies of Otway are not in the least worth reading. Their wit, some remarkable critical essays by Lamb,

Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, and Macaulay, and a modern collected edition, have secured for Wycherley, Congreve (*Love for Love, The Way of the World*), Vanbrugh (*The Relapse, The Confederacy*), and Farquhar (*The Beaux' Stratagem*) a more permanent audience; and some of the best scenes of Congreve and Vanbrugh cannot be surpassed in English, while there is hardly anything better, for mere wit, in Molière himself, though they have not his deeper knowledge of human nature.

**Prose contemporaries of Dryden: Temple and others.**

In prose, despite the premier position rightly assigned to him above in general style, Dryden does not so completely dwarf his contemporaries as he does in verse. His subjects were rather limited; his work being chiefly literary criticism in independent essays,[1] or prefaces to his plays and poems, his translations, and the like. Their themes were larger and more varied. As for Tillotson, his definitely literary importance is almost confined to the fact that Dryden is said to have acknowledged indebtedness to him in point of style. But Dryden, like some other if not many great authors, was the least conceited of men, and had sense enough to see that acknowledging your indebtedness to others only does you harm in the eyes of those whose opinion is worthless. Both dates and the actual contents of Tillotson's writings are against the notion. But he was a good writer and preacher, and sermons, read as well as heard, were still a very great power in the land. Sir William Temple, a statesman and diplomatist of great ability, but timid and somewhat time-serving, had something of Dryden's mixture of the old and the new in him, and has left varied essays of great interest and not a little charm.

[1] His earliest work of importance in this kind, the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1668), is not only of great importance as the first thoroughly literary and craftsmanlike piece of English criticism, but as an example, and almost a manifesto, of the new prose style—plain, conversational, but vigorous and not unpolished.

He was unlucky in taking up, with very insufficient knowledge, a part in the famous "Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns"[1] (see below on Swift), but he ended his essay on it with one of the finest sentences in the English language.[2] Halifax left little, and some of that little is not quite certainly his. But it is of great moment, containing as it does the first thoroughly competent political writing in English. South was a great reasoner, a master of humorous attack, and the most eloquent preacher of his day; and though his style, as was necessitated by the characteristics of that day, was less strangely beautiful than that of Donne or Taylor, it was clearer, and for general use more forcible. On the style of Locke opinions have varied much, but it is quite certain that his world-famous *Essay on the Human Understanding* cannot be misunderstood by anybody, except by those who have not brains enough to understand it in whatever style it might have been written. In all these writers we find the same characteristics—"strict attention to business" and a desire to make themselves understood by any ordinarily good understanding. Irony, the figure of speech most appropriate to the plain style, appears in most of them.

**Degradation of the plain style.**

The drawback, however, of this plain style in prose is an obvious one. Its object is to be clear, conversational, intelligible to the average person. Now the average person of all ages has been accustomed to use colloquial abbreviations, familiar catchwords, shorthand expressions, and what we call slang. Why not use these also?

[1] This dispute, originating in Italy about the close of the Renaissance, raged at intervals for nearly a century and a half. It was a very silly one, the Ancients being not better than the Moderns nor worse, but different.

[2] "When all is done, human life is, at the greatest and the best, but like a froward child, that must be played with and humoured a little to keep it quiet till it falls asleep; and then the care is over."

In other words, why not be not only familiar but vulgar? In Dryden's own day, especially the later part of it, this question was answered practically, and in the affirmative. Gentlemen like Sir Roger L'Estrange (1616–1704), scholars like Bentley, divines like Collier, indulged in colloquialisms of the kind, and there was considerable danger of their invading literature generally. But fortunately the tendency was observed, and directly combated, by a new school of distinguished writers, who arose at the extreme end of the seventeenth century. They were, for a time at least, all friends; they united in establishing a new and important kind in literature; and they all set themselves, as we may say, to reform literary manners, and not literary manners only. Their names—among the most famous in our history—were Joseph Addison (1672–1719), Richard Steele (1672–1729), and Jonathan Swift (1667–1745). Addison, who was a friend of Dryden's, and his collaborator, was an accomplished scholar in the not very profound University type of his day, and had written, both in Latin and English, verse and prose, of some merit but of no great importance, before the close of the seventeenth century; exhibiting also in one piece that complete misunderstanding of earlier English literature which Dryden had not shared, much less initiated, but which was to discredit great part of the eighteenth century.[1] Steele, like Addison an Oxford man, had not established himself there, but had gone into the army, taken to writing plays, and also (as for a short time was common with literary men) to public life. Swift, a relation of Dryden's, a dependent for a long time of Sir William Temple's, by place of birth though not by family an Irishman, was the eldest of the three, but had had less

**The rescue by Addison, Steele, and Swift.**

[1] Chaucer is an obsolete and unpolished buffoon, Spenser a dull moralist, etc., etc. But it is fair to say that he repented this later.

opportunity of showing a genius which was far greater than that of Addison and Steele. He had published little or nothing save some very bad "Pindarics," but he had written two things of very great power, the political-ecclesiastical satire of *A Tale of a Tub*, a masterpiece of irony, and the little satirical sketch, *The Battle of the Books*, a contribution to that "Ancient and Modern Quarrel" which has been mentioned, and again a masterpiece of the lighter kind.

Their action in the periodical.

Meanwhile the kind of literature which is termed "periodical," long delayed, was getting itself ready. We have seen how the Elizabethan pamphlet was a rather clumsy attempt to supply the want; and in the seventeenth century attempts at the actual newspaper became more and more common. The most famous before 1700 was the *Observator* of the just-mentioned Sir Roger L'Estrange, a man of great ability and unflinching energy on the Royalist side, something of a scholar, and master of a style somewhat, as has been said, vulgarised, but forcible, popular, and effective in a very high degree. His paper was purely political and controversial; but on the other side, and a little later, Daniel Defoe, already a busy writer on all sorts of subjects, but still far off his final fame as a novelist, started a remarkable attempt called *The Review*, which he carried on single-handed for a time. From this Steele, or more probably Steele instigated by Swift (who had an almost uncanny habit, not merely of doing great things himself, but of suggesting them to his friends), devised *The Tatler*, and summoned Addison to his help. All three wrote in this; but party politics soon divided them, and when *The Tatler* was dropped and the still more famous *Spectator* was substituted, Addison and Steele wrote with only minor helpers, and Addison soon became the master spirit.

L'Estrange and Defoe, *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, etc.

These periodicals were not exclusively or even prim-

arily political, though in general spirit, and in some special articles, they took the Whig side strongly. Nor, after a few early numbers of *The Tatler*, did they pretend to deal regularly with "news," home or foreign. They were nothing if not critical. Swift wrote in *The Tatler* a direct attack on the vulgarisms of speech and style above noted; and he and his coadjutors showed in practice how clearness and plainness could be attained without in the least degrading style. His own, whether in straightforward narration, exposition, or in ironical argument, is unmatched for force. Addison's, and in a rather less degree Steele's, is not easily surpassed for ease and a certain sort of grace.

In intellectual power Swift was by far the greatest of the three, and even that habit of abandoning the carrying out of his ideas to others which has been noticed, and his indifference alike to fame and to profit arising from his work, did not prevent him from leaving books of transcendent genius. Indeed this term, which should not be lightly used, is perhaps applicable to no English writer of the eighteenth century so safely as to him. The two little masterpieces above mentioned were published in 1704, and were followed by several smaller works, chiefly of a political kind—for Swift's strongest interest was always in politics. The incoming of the Hanover line put an end to his active share in these, but he revenged himself in the famous *Drapier's Letters* (1724) on a question of Irish coinage, and more worthily in the great satirical tale of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Other things, and especially a charming though still satirical *Polite Conversation* (1738), showed at once his own mastery of the plain style, and the suitableness of that style, when thoroughly mastered and kept from degrading itself, for many kinds of subject to which the ornate form would have been totally *un*suitable.

**Swift's other works.**

Effects of the Addisonian periodical.

This raising of the plain style, in which Addison and Steele took part, is one of the main points of importance of the new periodical, but it has others of a more varied kind. It brought practically all branches of literature (for both Addison and Steele were sincerely religious, and the former wrote not a few articles on professedly sacred subjects) into a sort of common society, which in its turn was presented to the ordinary reader and to what is called "society" itself. Literary criticism (Addison's papers on Milton are famous), the fashions and amusements of the day, popularised philosophy (Addison's papers on Imagination are really the doctrine of Locke made easy), and a great number of other things were discussed in them. But what we see now to have been one of their most important influences was exercised on the novel. This, which was to be the most popular kind of literature ever known, was, for reasons not impossible to explain but out of place here, very long indeed in getting into prominent existence. Neither Addison nor Steele wrote anything that can be properly called a novel. Swift came nearer to it in his above-mentioned *Gulliver's Travels* and even his *Polite Conversation*. But all three helped to elaborate the easy style, without which the romance [1] was indeed possible but hardly the novel; [1] while Steele first imagined, and Addison then developed, the remarkable series of "Coverley Papers," which are as it were chapters of a novel already, and only need filling up to be a novel complete.

Not only were the *Tatler* and *Spectator* extremely popular at the time, but they continued to be imitated during the entire century, and remained, in a way difficult

[1] The difference between these two is not easy to put shortly; but it may be said that the romance deals chiefly with story and incident, the novel with character and the conversation which exhibits it.

to parallel in any other case, classics not merely of style but of manners and thought during that whole period. It is one of the most pregnant signs of change to be found anywhere that, at that century's end, Miss Austen[1] objects to *The Spectator*, not merely as out of date but as coarse and improper.

As often happens in such cases, some of the most distinguished writers of the day were attracted to these periodicals. Pope (see below) wrote in them, but the greatest prose-writer, greater than any other except Swift, was the philosopher George Berkeley (1685–1753). The success and influence of Locke caused indeed a great determination towards a certain kind of philosophy. Much of it (though not Berkeley's or David Hume's (1711–1776), who followed him) was shallow enough, and adjusted to the general "common sense" of the time. But it mostly (not wholly, as in the case of Bernard de Mandeville, 1670–1733) kept people away from the merely vulgar style.

**The second stage of Augustan poetry: Pope.**

The singular declension of poetry proper which we noticed in the time of Dryden continued for some ten years after his death. But then there arose a writer—like Addison in being Dryden's own pupil, though not in personal relations with him—as to whose position in poetry there have been violent disputes, but who was regarded for a long time as a very chief in the matter, and who certainly set patterns which were followed throughout the century. This was Alexander Pope (1688–1744), who, according to his own (unfortunately not always trustworthy) account, began to write verses when almost a child, and who certainly published some of remarkable technical accomplishment before he became a man. These juvenile poems were all imitative in subject—in

[1] See *Northanger Abbey*, not published till long after 1800, but written earlier.

fact Pope was never very original—and their style was a following of that of Dryden, gradually made more precise, and avoiding the licenses which Dryden had allowed himself. The result was absolute perfection of that quality which was known to the age as "smoothness." The metre is all but exclusively (Pope's work in others fills but a few pages) the heroic couplet; that couplet is almost invariably closed at the end; it hardly ever contains more than the strict ten syllables to each line; the iambic cadence is scarcely ever broken, and there is as a rule a well-marked pause so near the centre of each line that you can divide a batch of them almost right down the middle, like the parting of a head of hair, without cutting into a word.

Before long Pope applied the couplet to more important subjects. He began (1713) a translation of Homer which brought him in very large sums of money and was highly esteemed, though nothing can be less like the original. He composed an *Essay on Criticism* (1711), which in substance is only a patchwork of often misunderstood and nowhere really coherent borrowings from Latin and French writers, though it exhibits Pope's incomparable powers of expression within certain limits. But the liveliest, the most original in a way, and probably the best thing he ever wrote was the famous *Rape of the Lock* (1712–1714), a burlesque or mock-heroic poem on an incident in polite society, which he published in two forms, and which, in both, comes as near perfection as anything of a very artificial kind can do. Two more passionate serious pieces, the *Elegy on an Unfortunate Lady* and *Eloisa to Abelard*, showed how far Pope could go in this direction. Then he took to a peculiar kind of light verse satire, professedly imitated from Horace, but diversified by violent attacks on his literary enemies, which forms the material of the famous

*Dunciad* (1728, much re-written later) and most of the *Satires* and *Epistles* of his closing years, up to his death in 1744.

A single famous line of Pope's own—

What oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed,

especially if we add to it some such words as, "at least in this particular style," will describe, and has frequently been recognised as describing, his peculiar poetic character. Passion and imagination, except to a small extent in the two poems above noted, are almost excluded by his choice of themes; and elaborate appeal to the mind's eye and the mind's ear by gorgeous description of nature and varied harmony of verse was not required—might indeed hardly have been understood by his readers. Few poets have ever thought less originally or less profoundly; few have shown less power of systematic grasp of subject. But nobody, except perhaps Horace himself, has ever had such a gift of neat, terse, telling expression. This power, with his craftsmanship in perfecting the kind of versification above described, and the touches of something higher than his usual vein in the *Elegy*, the *Eloisa*, the close of the *Dunciad*, and one or two more places, make the question "Was Pope a poet?" (which was asked pretty early, and has often been repeated since), absurd. "Was he a great poet?" is a rather more difficult one to answer. But the safe position is that he was one of the greatest of poets in a class which is some way below the greatest. He seems to have claimed for himself a combination of "poetry" with "wit," and his possession of the latter, in more than one of its senses, and in a very high degree, cannot be disputed.

Unfortunately his strongest points were extremely imitable; and it is almost as safe to say that none of the

His curious imitableness.

greatest poets can be imitated in their strongest points. Even his epigrammatic expression was not unfrequently equalled by men of quite second or third-rate order like Richard Savage (1697–1743) and Charles Churchill (1731–1764). As for his versification, it was so purely a a matter of mechanism that it was exactly copied almost at once, as a singular incident showed. Tiring of the severe work of translating Homer with very slight if any knowledge of Greek, he engaged two other persons, Broome and Fenton, both better scholars than himself, and experienced versifiers, to help him in the *Odyssey*. To this day no competent critic, although furnished with information as to the books done by these auxiliaries, has been able to distinguish any difference in the character of the work. And so it continued till the very close of the century. In 1783, seventy years after Pope had begun the *Homer*, John Hoole, a friend of Dr. Johnson, a civil servant, and a man of letters, translated Ariosto in couplet. The medium is as unsuitable in the one case as in the other, and Hoole had not Pope's saving grace of expression ; but, as far as the versification goes, there is very little to choose. As Cowper about the same time said, " every rhymester had the tune by heart."

We must not refuse to acknowledge in this a certain triumph of its own kind. A man who can devise something that admits of no improvement in its own way, and which satisfies the demands of the majority of his contemporaries and successors for nearly an entire century[1] may not be a great poet, but is certainly a very great man of letters. Nor, unsuitable as this couplet may be to the very greatest poetry, had it few or small

[1] Even this limitation is not strictly necessary : as late as 1830, and even later, there were those who thought Pope's style the perfection of English verse.

capacities for poetic work. It is, with Dryden's, the best medium for satire ever known; it was used, after Pope's day, by Johnson for the *Vanity of Human Wishes* with its splendid close, and later, by Goldsmith for the attractive picture of *The Deserted Village*. Artificial as it is, it served for the first efforts of "realist" poetry in English by Crabbe. And, as has been said, it cannot, when taken with Dryden's, be refused the full credit of having thoroughly beaten regular rhythm into the English ear.[1] Pope indeed was not like Dryden, in having, to use his own words in his most powerful piece of satire,—the passage on "Atticus" (Addison),—"no brothers near *his* throne." In his later years, as will be seen in a moment, there were some poets whose work, whether they meant it or not, was really opposed to his in spirit as in form; in his earlier there were others who were quite independent of him. Swift himself, if not a great poet, was a very skilful versifier in the octosyllabic couplet and in anapaest; while Matthew Prior (1664–1721) holds almost the first place in English for one small but very interesting class, the so-called "Verse of Society," which is written in light metre and manner on chance occasions. No one except Thackeray has ever surpassed him, and only two or three nineteenth-century poets have equalled him in this combination of humour and feeling, shown in such things as the famous "To a Child of Quality" and the less popular but profounder "Lines Written in Mézeray's *History of France*." John Gay (1685–1732), the intimate friend both of Pope and Swift, is now known chiefly by his *Fables*, but he wrote many other things, all of the lighter kind, and some of the shorter of these are nearly as good as Prior.

Other poets: Prior, Gay, Young, etc

[1] It would not be much of an exaggeration to say that this accomplishment was typical of the "Augustan" mission generally to regularise, rationalise, and produce a standard.

Edward Young (1683–1765), a slightly older man than Pope, long outlived him, and it was late (1742–1744) before he produced his still famous though not now much read *Night Thoughts*, the stiff and declamatory blank verse of which sometimes becomes really fine; but he even preceded Pope in Pope's own kind of satire (*The Universal Passion*, 1725). Thomas Parnell (1679–1718), also a member of the Addison group, and once famous for the Eastern apologue of *The Hermit*, is chiefly noted now for some curious anticipations[1] of the description of natural scenery and the thoughts caused by it, which did not become general till the influence of Pope had waned. But none of these poets could pretend to anything like the position and influence which were almost at once exercised, and which continued to be exercised, by Pope himself.

And others still, of a different school.

It is, however, almost invariably noticeable that when such a predominance as this establishes itself, exceptions to it, and more and more conscious revolts against it, take place. The existence of these, their progress, and the ups-and-downs in it constitute the great interest of the poetry of the last three-quarters of the eighteenth century from the historical point of view. Hardly anybody, poet or critic, till very late in the century disputed the predominance itself; but in practice there were some powerful influences rivalling or working against it. In the first place, there was blank verse. This, as we have seen, recovered its place in dramatic poetry pretty soon; but admiration of Milton did not lead to much imitation of him till the eighteenth century began and had even advanced some way. There were only casual and (as in John Philips's (1676–

[1] There are still more striking ones in the generally inferior work of Lady Winchelsea (1660?–1720), a friend of Pope's again, but of an older generation.

1708) *Cider* and *Splendid Shilling*) half-burlesque attempts before the appearance (1726) of James Thomson's (1700–1748) *Winter*, followed by the rest of *The Seasons*. The great popularity of this, partly caused and partly assisted by a general desire for some alternative to the couplet, brought about a good many other blank verse poems, and blank verse continued, though not regarded with favour by critics (even by so great a one as Dr. Johnson), to be written throughout the century. Even in Thomson, however, to some extent, and in all others before Cowper (sometimes even in him), the imitation of Milton was a little disastrous. Milton, though never conventional, is not *easy*; and eighteenth-century poetry, though it could be easy enough, always inclined to the conventional, so that blank verse itself became stiff and artificial. If it were not "tumid and gorgeous," Johnson scornfully said, it would be mere prose; and his contemporaries certainly justified him to some extent. They were so afraid of writing prose that they became tumid always, though sometimes not at all gorgeous. Still, it was an alternative to the couplet; and the nature of Thomson's subject supported it in a way of which more presently.

**Thomson and blank verse.**

Even better was another exception, or rather pair of exceptions, which, though not showing themselves quite so early as Milton's time, were fortified by the great examples noted above, Swift and Prior, before as well as during the time of Pope. These were the use of the octosyllabic couplet and that of trisyllabic (anapaestic) measures. The former is the one metre which has held its ground at every period and stage of English literature, from its first appearance in Layamon seven hundred years ago till the present day. Its popularity in serious use had been strengthened by Milton's earlier poems, in comic and satiric by *Hudibras*. Taken up, as it now was,

by two writers of the highest reputation, it could not be forbidden or despised by the narrowest critics. Even before them Dryden had written in the trisyllabic or anapaestic measures, which, though very old in basis and never quite absent from popular song, had been mainly confined to this song till that great poet took them up. Now, both these metres were largely used, and Prior's anapaests, written with extraordinary spirit and grace, continued to be employed for light work throughout the century. *Grongar Hill* (1726), a very beautiful serious poem by John Dyer (1700–1758) in octosyllables, appeared in the same year as Thomson's *Winter*; and both were even better reliefs and contrasts to the fashionable "heroic" than blank verse itself. Neither of them encouraged incorrect or doggerel rhythm, but both were essentially free in treatment. The highest authorities—Shakespeare, Fletcher, Milton—had always sanctioned the omission of one syllable in the octosyllable couplet, and this made an instant variety of line-cadence, iambic and trochaic becoming mixed. Nobody, indeed, till Chatterton's and Blake's time dared to admit trisyllables in these. But the anapaestic measures admitted the mixture of disyllabic feet quite easily, and so the great principles, institutions, and in a word life-pulses of English poetry, Equivalence and Substitution, were kept in evidence.

Lighter verse.

In most cases except Prior's (who has left us definite expression of his dissatisfaction with the couplet) these various forms were probably chosen, by the poets who used them, with no conscious intention of standing up against it, and merely because what they chose suited their tastes and their subjects. But by degrees a new generation arose who were evidently bent on innovation as such. The greatest of these were Thomas Gray (1716–1771) and William Collins (1721–1759), while

William Shenstone (1714–1763), though a much smaller poet, may be grouped with them. He wrote in all sorts of measures, but he preferred easy if rather "rickety" anapaests, like those of his *Pastoral Ballad*;[1] and he has left us prose notes which show that he was thoroughly dissatisfied with the prevailing practice and theory of the time. Collins, a poet of the purest kind, began with some *Eclogues*, in commonplace and rather bad couplets. But for the few and often exquisite *Odes* and smaller pieces by which he is known (few—for his life was short, and he was insane during great part of it)—*Liberty*, *The Passions*, *The Superstitions of the Highlands*, "How Sleep the Brave," *The Death of Thomson*, etc.—he chose lyric measures, sometimes Greek in system, sometimes purely English, and in one instance (*Evening*) used unrhymed stanzas. Gray's exquisite but still more careful and leisurely work shows a classicism which is Greek rather than Roman, and an attention to kinds of modern literature, such as Welsh and Norse, which are purely Romantic, a studious avoidance of heroic couplet, and, considering the limits of his work, a very wide and miscellaneous selection of subject. His famous *Elegy*, though it may come short of the greatest seventeenth- and nineteenth-century work, has been described as "the perfection of such poetry as every one can understand"; *The Bard*, and *The Progress of Poesy*, are specimens of the elaborate ode fashioned on the strict Greek pattern; and in part of his unfinished *Ode on Vicissitude* he has anticipated the very spirit and manner of Wordsworth. In all these poets—least in Shenstone, but even in him, and most in Collins—one feels a curious sense of

**Gray, Collins, Shenstone, etc.**

[1] My banks they are furnished with bees
Whose murmur invites one to sleep;
My grottoes are shaded with trees,
And my hills are white over with sheep, etc. etc.

discontent; of groping after something new and more natural; of a feeling for nature which is quite absent from Pope and mostly so from his contemporaries; together with at least traces of that quest for something "remote and afar," something beyond rule and line, without which the greatest poetry can hardly exist.

Symptoms of change about 1760: *Ossian*, Percy's *Reliques*, etc.

A little later, about 1760, came a memorable set of books, published, in most cases, without the least understanding or common purpose between the authors, but foreshadowing, and leading directly up to, a great literary counter-revolution. These were James Macpherson's *Ossian* (1760–1763), published at first in parts, and entitled *Fingal* and *Temora*, Percy's *Reliques* (1765), Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764), and Hurd's *Essays on Chivalry and Romance* (1762), with, a little later still, the extraordinary work of the ill-fated boy Thomas Chatterton (1752–1770). All these went in a direction exactly contrary to that of Pope, and (though not so exactly, for the ballad of "Chevy Chase" had been praised in *The Spectator*) that of Addison. The tendency of the whole century, and of its first half more particularly, was towards common-sense attention to town life first of all, with a distinct contempt for matters mediaeval. *Ossian*, forgery or not (a point with which the student need not trouble himself just yet), dealt with most uncertain times of the Dark Ages, in a vague and mystical style, full of elaborate descriptions of wild and gloomy natural scenery; introduced but shadowy characters fighting obscurely for unknown causes; and dealt with the whole in a curious sort of verse-prose or prose-verse, as different as possible from the neat and precise style of the time. The *Reliques* collected, with some spurious things and a good many modern tamperings, a large proportion of the best old ballads and not a little other older poetry. It would be

difficult to name a book which had more to do with the Romantic Revival. Horace Walpole's novel (see below for that kind generally) was an imitation romance of the supernatural kind—romance and the supernatural being two things which the men of the time generally scorned. Hurd's *Essays* boldly attacked the limitation of the standards of criticism to classical patterns, arguing that there was a Romantic as well as a Classical "unity," that one time could not prescribe to another, and so forth. And lastly, Chatterton, forging what he called the "Rowley" poems of a supposed fifteenth-century writer at Bristol, revived the precious irregularities of ballad measure and copied its diction, incorrectly enough no doubt, but with a poetic value which was rather strangely absent from his abundant verse in ordinary English, and which had a great effect on his successors.

For the moment, however, these yearnings or gropings after the Romantic did not come to very much practically, and it was perhaps as well that they did not, for the time was not quite ready. People's notions of Romantic quality itself and of its great home, mediaeval literature, were very vague and inexact; and a good deal of historical and literary work had to be done before they could be improved. It was therefore positively salutary, in more ways than one, that the greatest literary influence of the third quarter of the century—that of Samuel Johnson (1709–1784)—tended on the whole to express these innovations, especially as such repression, like the process of "cutting back" in gardening, almost always strengthens the growth. But, before we consider Johnson himself, it will be well to take note of the remarkable advance in one long-missing department of literature which began when he was a boy, and in which he lived to take a part—though a rather outside part—himself.

The growth of the novel.

Various glances have already been made, in the course of this short history, at the growth of prose fiction and the way in which it was in one way or another hampered. And we saw how what might at first sight have been thought to hamper it again—the prevalence of a business-like spirit in thought and style—really helped it. People wanted amusement as well as business; and the plain and easy style of writing, if not better for actual romance, was better for the novel—that is to say, for the kind of fiction which deals with character and with more or less everyday events. The Spaniards as well as the French had been beforehand with us in this respect, and imitation of the former, especially of Cervantes (*Don Quixote*), and of the latter, especially Le Sage (*Gil Blas*), helped us a little. But the eighteenth century was to see England taking the absolute lead in the kind, and furnishing back patterns to France herself and to Germany, for Spanish and Italian literature were not in a condition vigorous enough to receive them.

Defoe again.

The first Englishman to produce a considerable body of prose fiction which was important as literature was Daniel Defoe. He was nearly or quite sixty, and had been writing an immense volume of verse and prose—travels and journalism, pamphlets, and what not else—when, in 1719, he produced the world-renowned story of *Robinson Crusoe*, and followed it up rapidly with others, less known and more unequal, but at their best not less remarkable. In these books Defoe, as he had always done, utilised much that had been written before,—*Robinson Crusoe* itself is a sort of abstract, made and supplemented by genius, of innumerable "voyages and travels" which a century of busy and adventurous exploration had accumulated. The very remarkable *Adventures of Captain Singleton* describes the interior of Africa with a precision which can hardly have been attained without

some knowledge of the Portuguese explorers, the only people who had penetrated there. *The Memoirs of a Cavalier* may have been constructed in the same way from actual experiences. But *Moll Flanders*, a study of lower and lowest class London life, can hardly be other than original in all but its general plan, which is that of the Spanish "picaresque" novel (one which deals with *picaros* or rogues). And the same is the case with another, *Colonel Jack*. Defoe's secret is the laborious and unerring way in which he accumulates detail (whether second-hand or originally observed and imagined), and tells his story in a fashion which makes it seem absolutely true. He has no intimate or artistic grasp of character, and his stories are rather successions of incident than the working out of a regular plot. But he had got at "verisimilitude," as it is called—truth and lifelikeness—as nobody had done before; and, in some of his books at least, he had not gone beyond quite ordinary events. He has no fine writing, though his descriptions can be very vivid; his conversation, though commonplace enough, is exactly what people concerned would have said. In other words, he has written the novel, if not the complete novel.

**Swift again.**

*Gulliver's Travels* came later than Defoe, and may have owed a very little to him in some ways, but it has a far higher intellectual quality. In main purpose, indeed, it is a sharp and continuous satire on the follies and faults of humanity. But Swift's own genius, and the turn of the general tide towards novel-writing, made it also a story which is almost independent of this purpose, and which can be read and has been read by thousands without any, or with hardly any, attention to the satire. Still, both this and most of Defoe's were either stories of pure adventure, that is to say, rather romances than novels, or that lower kind of novel just mentioned which

deals with the tricks and crimes of vulgar life. Nor had either (though Swift did something like it in his *Polite Conversation*) drawn, in prose narrative, a character like those common in drama, that is to say, a vivid and well-separated personality whom we should recognise if we met him or her in real life. This accomplishment, and the companion one of representing actual manners and society, were left unachieved for a time, though not for a long time.

The complete novel: Richardson,

Between 1740 and 1760 four writers of curiously contrasted genius solidly established the English novel in forms which have undergone only minor alterations or extensions since. Samuel Richardson (1689–1761), a printer, wrote *Pamela* (1740—the adventures of a girl of the lower class but thrown into higher society, who is tempted and persecuted but resists and triumphs), *Clarissa* (a contrasted picture of that higher society itself), and *Sir Charles Grandison*, an elaborate portrait of what Richardson thought a perfect gentleman and "a good man," contrasting crosswise with Lovelace, the bad hero of *Clarissa*. In these books he showed a great power of analysing motive and rendering conversation, but was terribly long-winded, and made his work more so by a system of writing the novels in sets of letters from the characters to each other. Johnson, who had personal obligations to him and admired his books, admitted that if you read them for the story you would hang yourself. Nor was Richardson very well acquainted with the talk and manners of the higher society which

Fielding,

he attempted to depict. Henry Fielding (1707–1754), on the other hand, a man of good family and education but small means, who had begun with not very brilliant play-writing, was tempted by some absurdities and priggishnesses in *Pamela* to caricature it, in what turned out to be something far higher than a caricature, the

admirable novel of *Joseph Andrews* (1742), one of the personages in which, the Reverend Abraham Adams, is the first great *character* in English fiction. He followed this up with *Jonathan Wild*, the ironic picture, a little in Swift's manner, of a real scoundrel of the time, with the masterpiece of *Tom Jones*, and with a fourth novel, *Amelia*, highly appreciated by some great judges. Fielding used the direct narrative form, interspersing it, however, with fair description and much digressive address to the reader, like that of Thackeray later. He attended very specially to the construction of plot (*Tom Jones* has been considered a model and standard in this way), but above all he produced characters of such absolute lifelikeness as had never been seen before in the novel and rarely in the drama. In fact, at this early stage, he accomplished work which has never been surpassed and only once or twice equalled. Nor, with the necessary allowance for change of manners, etc., which has long had to be made, is it at all probable that it will ever be surpassed.

Both he and Richardson, however, had strictly confined themselves to contemporary English life.[1] Tobias Smollett (1721–1771), who followed quickly, introduced the interest of foreign travel and adventure, combining it, however, with a fair share of the new novel-qualities, and adding some special touches, such as his professional experiences as a naval surgeon, in his first book, *Roderick Random*, and to a less extent in his second, *Peregrine Pickle*; the "humours" (see above, p. 103) of minor national peculiarities, as in the Welshman Morgan and the Scotsman Lismahago, the ways of fashionable resorts like Bath, and many others. Lastly, Laurence Sterne (1713–1768), a Yorkshire clergyman, if he did not exactly

Smollett. and Sterne.

[1] Richardson in *Sir Charles Grandison* has Italian scenes and characters, but they have no local or distinguishing quality.

invent, "put," as we say, "together" specimens of the eccentric novel in *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*. In the first of these novels there is no story, and merely a succession of sketches and episodes in the second; but they abound in witty and humorous touches—quaint tricks of style, quotations and adaptations from forgotten books, a very strong infusion of the sentimentality which was being imported from France, and now and then singularly vivid inset sketches of character and manners, "my Uncle Toby" being the most famous.

**Great outburst of minor novel-writing.**

To understand the true importance of the work of these four men we should not confine ourselves to the intrinsic excellence of their particular books, great, especially in the case of Fielding, as that was. We should regard it as a set of incursions or explorations into different parts of a hitherto unknown and almost forbidden country, the riches and attractions of which they disclosed, but only in parts, though each of them took a different part. More timid adventurers could follow in their steps; bolder ones could follow, not their steps, but their general example, and try fresh districts of the new region for themselves. It is certain that in a very few years—before, in fact, Sterne had written—the novel, which had been one of the lowest esteemed, least frequently cultivated, and most unsatisfactory of literary kinds, began to be one of the most popular, was written in very large numbers, and continued in various forms to be so. By degrees, too, even the slight tendency to resort to unusual and adventurous incident, which had been retained by novelists, was found to be unnecessary; and Frances Burney (1752–1840), in *Evelina* (1778), showed that an interesting novel could be made out of almost purely ordinary occurrences. Towards the end of the century this system was indeed

reversed in the "Terror and Mystery" novel of Mrs. Radcliffe (1764–1822), M.[1] G. Lewis (1775–1818), and others, as well as in the novels of revolutionary purpose, instigated by the troubles in France, which were written by Thomas Holcroft (1745–1809), William Godwin (1756–1836), and others still. But these were only some of the signs of the Romantic movement to be noticed at the end of this chapter and in the whole of the next. Mrs. Radcliffe and Godwin will recur.

It was observed above that the writing of a novel by Johnson is a very noteworthy thing. *Rasselas* (1759) is indeed not even quite so much of a pure novel as *Euphues* itself, and it is, though with more skill, equally made the vehicle or instrument of a serious purpose. It is in fact a counterpart, in prose fiction, of its author's *Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749) in verse. But that such an author should have tried such a form at all shows the influence and popularity that the form itself had obtained.

Samuel Johnson is not uncommonly taken as a typical man of letters of the middle and later, but not quite latest, eighteenth century, and though he had some weaknesses, few centuries could but be proud of such a representative. His early struggles, his personal peculiarities, his ill-health, and other things have been made matters of common knowledge, as is hardly the case with any other author, by James Boswell's unequalled biography, and through the almost equally famous essays on that book by men like Macaulay and Carlyle. But he was so strong an intellectual personality that different and more fortunate ways of life would probably not have altered him much. He had actually leanings, and Johnson.

[1] Usually called "Monk" Lewis from the title, *The Monk*, of his best known novel. Mrs. Radcliffe's most famous book was *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

decided ones, towards Romanticism of a kind; but neo-classicism was the orthodox literary creed of his time, and the ruling passion, the essential humour of Johnson's spirit, was a general orthodoxy or conservatism, though this was not incompatible with the utmost independence on minor points. His great influence, not altogether easy to understand (for only a few could hear his explosive but vigorous conversation, and his published works[1] were few, and not of a kind at first sight likely to exercise much influence), undoubtedly postponed the triumph of the Romantic movement itself, but enabled him to leave us an example of the earlier and opposite literary stage at its very best. His verse is rhetorical and of the Pope kind; but the before-mentioned conclusion of *The Vanity of Human Wishes* is one of the very finest pieces of rhetorical poetry to be found from Juvenal to Victor Hugo. His prose, though occasionally ponderous and always rather too much inclined to a mechanical arrangement of balance and antithesis, gave an immense dead lift to the dulness into which English prose had again fallen after Addison, and has furnished much to all standard styles since. Nor must it be forgotten that his manliness and independence of character did much—almost incalculably much—to redeem literature from the taint of disrepute and servility into which it had fallen after the brief heyday in Queen Anne's reign, and which Pope's selfish satire had positively encouraged.

His society: Goldsmith and others.

Johnson was the centre of a literary society which, though by no means in exact accordance with his views

[1] His famous *Dictionary*, his essays of the *Spectator* kind (*The Rambler*, *The Idler*, etc.), a very few poems, a play (*Irene*), and some political pamphlets, with *Rasselas* itself, and his *Journey to the Western Islands*, almost exhaust the list. His famous *Lives of the Poets*, containing at once his most popular and his most excellent work, were not written till the last years of his life, long after the influence spoken of was solidly established.

on all points, still possessed a certain common character, and represents the later eighteenth century as that of Addison, Steele, Swift, Pope, Prior, Gay, etc., had represented the earlier. This included the great actor Garrick, who was also a man of letters in his way; Oliver Goldsmith, poet, essayist, dramatist, and novelist (1728–1774), who had a more versatile and flexible genius than Johnson's, a delightful Irish humour, a charming style, and who, as his great friend said of him, touched all kinds of literature, and touched nothing that he did not adorn; Edmund Burke (1729–1797), the most literary of English orators, whose style was less artificial than Johnson's, but equally improved upon the extreme plain variety, and sometimes eloquent in the very highest degree; James Boswell (1740–1795), the greatest if not the wisest of English biographers; and Edward Gibbon (1737–1794), the greatest if not the most amiable or respectable of English historians. Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* (1769), in verse, and in prose his *Vicar of Wakefield* (1762–1766) (an irregular novel which became popular all over Europe), his *Citizen of the World* and other *Essays*, as well as his two famous plays,[1] *She Stoops to Conquer* and *The Good-natured Man*; Burke's speeches and his great pamphlet attacks on the

[1] The drama in the eighteenth century requires but little notice. In the early years Steele wrote plays recognising to some extent the criticisms of Collier (see above, p. 142), and Colley Cibber, Mrs. Centlivre, and others continued the "Restoration" lines with less scruple. Fielding, as has been said, was a dramatist, as were, in their different fashions, Gay (*The Beggars' Opera*), the poets Young and Thomson, and even Dr. Johnson himself. The theatre indeed was as popular as ever, and very large numbers of new plays were written; while the old ones, as well as these new, were performed by actors of whom David Garrick (1717–1779), already mentioned, was the chief, and who have been sometimes thought to have reached (not only in his case) the highest level of English stage performance. But, as literature, the new work was of little value, Goldsmith's (as noted in the text), and that of Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816), *The Rivals*, *The Critic*, *The School for Scandal*, being the chief exceptions.

French Revolution; and Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; must always rank as English classics. History indeed had been, like fiction, one almost of the special growths of the eighteenth century, largely owing to the example set earlier by two natives of Scotland, David Hume (1711–1776) and William Robertson (1721–1793). Hume, as was said above, belonged also to the group of the philosophers, who, though generally of a more superficial kind than Berkeley or himself, were very numerous. Literary criticism again, though except in the case of Johnson not of much value, and even in him still limited by the narrow ideas of the time, was largely practised. So was the essay, though it was rather hampered by the cut-and-dried *Spectator* pattern. In fact it may be emphasised that in every kind of literature likely to benefit by the existence of a commonly recognised, clear, plain style of prose-writing, and in those subsidiary kinds of poetry which require, not lofty imagination or a supreme technical skill, but ease, deftness, and suitableness to satirical, political, and similar subjects, the eighteenth century acquitted itself in a way contempt of which would only show that the contemner's notions were far narrower than its own. It was a great century too, perhaps our greatest, for letter-writing, and the letters of Lord Chesterfield (1694–1773), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), Horace Walpole, and Gray showed, and when published helped to disseminate, easy and polished expression.

**The heralds of a new change: Cowper, Crabbe, Burns, and Blake.**

Yet, though it had all these accomplishments, and though much of its literature has to this day a curious faculty of amusing, and as it were resting, the mind of more troubled generations, though, too, it was the first century in which English literature exercised considerable influence abroad, there was something wanting in it, and the sense of the want, felt to some extent early

as shown above, showed itself in multiple forms later. The causes of the complete change will be best dealt with at the beginning of the next chapter. But signs of it became more and more frequent and striking. In the last twenty years of the century four poets, remarkably different in circumstances and character, heralded this change. William Cowper (1731–1800), a much older man than the others, but kept back by mental illness for some twenty years, began to write late (about 1780), and showed some of the earlier characteristics in style. But he devoted himself enthusiastically to description of rural scenes, and attacked the style of Pope directly, while in an unfinished poem called *Yardley Oak* he anticipated Wordsworth both in spirit and in the quality of his blank verse. George Crabbe (1754–1832) turned from the general optimism or sentimentality of the century to what is now called "realism," and though his manner was somewhat old-fashioned, introduced an entirely new style of description, and a temper almost as novel, in his poem of *The Village* (1782). Robert Burns (1759–1796), partly by rehandling older Scottish songs, and partly by his own original work, introduced most powerful agents of change—his Scottish dialect, his varied and to the age[1] novel metres, his passionate love poetry, and his vivid and unfamiliar description all contributing. And lastly, William Blake (1757–1827), though he can hardly be said to have influenced his contemporaries at all, expressed by anticipation the purest characteristics, in form and spirit alike, of Romantic poetry. Fresh schools of novel-writing, partly noticed above, arose, together with clumsy attempts at historical romance and many other things. Most of this latter work was mistaken and mediocre, though there was some

[1] As was noted above, *the* "Burns metre" is Provençal in origin, and is common in Middle English romances and plays.

brilliant poetical satire—the *Rolliad* (1784–1785) and the work of Wolcot (1738–1819, "Peter Pindar") on the Whig side, and the *Anti-Jacobin* (1797–1798) by Canning, Ellis, and Frere on the Tory—to relieve it. It was only towards the extreme end that a really new school arose, and to this we must turn in the next chapter.

The Library a little before 1800.

The additions, in individual books, of this long period to the English Library were enormous; and almost more important in kinds than in numbers. We saw how, at 1660 or thereabouts, though there was a certain amount of (mostly translated) fiction in prose, it was, with few exceptions, themselves not very good, of the most worthless character. Nor can the first forty years of the present period (1660–1700) add anything of the first class but *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) of John Bunyan (1628–1688), with minor books of merit by him, though there was still larger addition in mere bulk. But 1700–1800 tells a different tale. *Gulliver* and *Robinson Crusoe* and the companions of the latter; *Pamela* and *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison*; *Joseph Andrews* and *Jonathan Wild* and *Tom Jones* and *Amelia*; *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, and *Humphrey Clinker*; *Tristram Shandy* and the *Sentimental Journey*,—what a shelf would these only, without their numerous and innumerable companions and successors, make in comparison, with any that the department of the novel could show before! And it went on filling for the whole time.

In the chief other section which was slow in presenting itself, that of the newspaper or periodical, the accomplishment was not so signal, but the progress was still great. Papers of strict "news," and to some extent of comment on that news, became commoner even between 1660 and 1700, while, a hundred years later, the library racks and reading-boards began to show names—*The Times*, *The Globe*, *The Morning Post*—familiar in the corresponding places still. Much earlier, and in ways more directly or at least more exclusively concerning literature, had appeared the Addisonian essay-periodical, still to be seen in (slightly changed) existence as the "articles" of weekly papers; and a little later the earliest examples of the monthly review or magazine. The time was indeed far off when large libraries would have to transport their masses of this kind of litera-

ture to suburban store-houses; but to a shrewd observer that time was almost in sight.

In books proper of the older classes the period was fertile enough, both prose and verse. Its bookcases of poetry now contained *Hudibras* and the poems of Dryden, those of Prior and Pope and their lesser contemporaries; the abundant stores of light verse which the student may find in the famous *Collection* or *Miscellany* made by the bookseller Dodsley about the middle of the eighteenth century; the work (partly to be found in the same place) of Gray and Collins; the singular achievement of Chatterton, and (not to mention scores of other things and persons) the promise and performance alike of the great concluding quartet, Cowper, Crabbe, Burns, and Blake.

In drama the quantity of the additions would indeed far exceed the quality, though this last would not be lacking in the examples noted above. But it is in what is called "serious" prose that the work of value added to the list of English classics would be found most abundant; while in some cases that value would be very high indeed. From Dryden (again) and the great group of prose-writers noticed with him, the succession never failed through the further group of Swift and the "Queen Anne" men onwards. Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon most of all, formed (for men like Knolles and Clarendon are isolated) the English historical school. Berkeley and Hume again contributed epoch-making work in philosophy; and produced indirectly a vast literature, inferior to theirs but not contemptible, of following, or of controversy. Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776), if it does not found the dubious and contentious science of Political Economy, gives its first and perhaps greatest English classic. Johnson's original printed work (see above), if it expresses his actual genius inadequately, was widely read at the time, and is worth reading at all times; while his humbler *Dictionary* actually starts (once more) the mustering and consideration of English words and their uses in an orderly and coherent fashion. Theologians of the first class, with the exception of Berkeley again and Bishop Butler (*Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion*, 1736), add little to the choicer shelves, for the causes which tended to stunt poetry at the time did not encourage loftier theology; but abundance of respectable work was done here also. And to the already mentioned "new bookcases" (surprising already in number and contents) we must add one for which it is difficult to find a single label—that which is to contain letters, diaries,

biographies, and autobiographies—"books about people," as the cant phrase goes. With Samuel Pepys (1633–1703) and John Evelyn (1620–1706) and Roger North (1653–1734)—writers of diaries, or notes on their own times and experiences, who would have deserved fuller notice above had we room for it—in Charles II.'s reign; with the letters of Chesterfield and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Horace Walpole in the eighteenth century; with Miss Burney's (Madame D'Arblay's) *Diary* in its later years; with Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* and Boswell's *Life of Johnson*—with hundreds of lesser books of the same kind or kinds—here once more is a startling exchange of emptiness for fulness. The collector of 1800 would probably (see next chapter) by that time have dusted and ransacked older shelves which his immediate predecessors had unwisely neglected; but he would be almost as unwise if he in his turn neglected the additions made by those predecessors themselves.

# CHAPTER VII

## THE FIRST ROMANTIC PERIOD

### *Early Nineteenth-century Literature*, 1798–1834

Causes and character of the Romantic revival—Chief agencies and agents in it—The *Lyrical Ballads*: Coleridge—His paramount and pervading influence—The principles of the *Lyrical Ballads*, and of Coleridge's other work—Wordsworth—Scott—Southey—Campbell—Moore—Landor—Byron—Shelley and Keats—Shelley—Keats—Their joint though various influence, and its character—The novel: Transition writers—Scott—Miss Austen—Significance of their work—Criticism: extensive cultivation of it—Hazlitt—Lamb—Leigh Hunt—Historians, their number and importance—The characteristics of nineteenth-century *belles lettres*—Theology, philosophy, science—Influence of the periodical in all departments—Reasons for division at this point—The reality of Victorian literature—The nineteenth-century Library.

**Causes and character of the Romantic revival.**

THE changes sketched or glanced at in the last pages of the foregoing chapter, and now to be considered, have naturally been the subject of even more debate, as to their causes and character, than those referred to on its first page. The character will form the subject of the present chapter. As to the causes, there is no room to discuss them, but the student may as well take note of them at once, and will find no difficulty in filling in the details of fact and argument later. They usually run as follows: a desire for larger, deeper, higher ranges of imagination in poetry and thought in prose; discontent with the somewhat confined scope of expression in both

divisions—the few and narrowly ruled metres in verse; the plain undistinguished style in prose; the dull and colourless language in both. These, with the shifting of interest from the town to the country (the "Return to Nature," as it is rather too sweepingly called), supply the chief *internal* influences—those which must have worked even if there had been no others. But they were powerfully reinforced by a second class, more accidental and external in character; the study of older and especially mediaeval literature, with the resulting discovery that there had been true poetry which had known nothing of the arbitrary rules of neo-classicism; the extension of such study to Eastern and Continental letters; the special influence of German, which, after being behind all other literatures in Europe for next to two centuries, had taken a great start under Lessing, Goethe, and others in the last half of the eighteenth; the French Revolution, with its double effect, first of a great revolt against existing institutions, and then of a vast patriotic reaction in England against the crimes and the follies of that Revolution itself.

**Chief agencies and agents in it.**

Once more a radical change was shown by, if not exactly due to, a group of men, born about the same time, and working, not by any means always consciously together, but for the same real ends. The most important of these were William Wordsworth (1770–1850), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), Robert Southey (1774–1843) (jointly called "the Lake School", from the place of residence of Wordsworth for almost his whole life, Southey for most of his, and Coleridge for some years), Walter Scott (1771–1832), Charles Lamb (1775–1834), William Hazlitt (1778–1830), with, a little later, Leigh Hunt (1784–1859), George Lord Byron (1788–1824), later still, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), and latest of all John Keats (1795–1821). Here,

however, the rule which we found applying formerly is reversed in an almost startling fashion. Every man in the earlier group, except Dryden, was wholly or all but wholly a prose-writer. Every one of these men, except Hazlitt, was more or less a poet, and most of them were great poets. And the book which served as, if not exactly a manifesto like Dryden's *Essay* and Sprat's *History*,[1] yet as an exemplification of the new ideals, was a book of poetry, the *Lyrical Ballads* of Wordsworth and Coleridge, published in 1798. Both men had written before, though in no such startling style or spirit. Indeed there was always, as was natural, a considerable eighteenth-century leaven in Wordsworth, Southey, and Scott, while Byron affected actually to prefer Pope and his school to his own work and that of his contemporaries. It was not till Shelley's work in verse and Thomas De Quincey's (1785-1859) in prose that pure romanticism appeared in original writing, not merely in criticism; but both these writers were strongly under the influence of Coleridge, and in different ways Wordsworth, Southey, Scott, and even Byron felt that strange and almost unexampled power which no man in English literature has ever exercised in the same way and to the same extent. He was unfortunately a man of weak will, irregular and self-indulgent habits, and perhaps (even if he had been free from these) naturally more capable of planning and suggesting than of performance. He has left us hundreds of pages of poetry, the really consummate parts of which do not extend to many hundred lines; and a not inconsiderable body of prose work, much of which consists of merely reported lectures or conversation; while hardly more than a single volume, the *Biographia Literaria*, is a fair realisation of the mighty schemes he was always forming.

The *Lyrical Ballads*: Coleridge.

[1] See above, p. 134.

His paramount and pervading influence.

He could (as the world never knew till the best part of a century after his death, when some fragments were published under the title of *Anima Poetae*) write extremely beautiful prose of a kind which had then no model; but he was content, in his published work, to use awkward and sometimes unintelligible sentences, which he himself admitted to be like "Surinam toads, with their young ones hanging all about them." The exceptional pieces of his verse noted above are among the greatest and purest examples of poetry itself that we have in English. The great ornate prose-writers of the nineteenth century were to take up the very methods which he had jotted down in pocket-books and left hidden; he absolutely revolutionised and restarted English criticism; and there was not a man of any literary power with whom he came in contact who did not show the traces of his influence, as if Coleridge had touched him with a magic rod. Wordsworth, a strong rather than fine nature, and with leanings always towards the prosaic, was never quickened to his best efforts till he had worked with Coleridge; a chance meeting at Oxford with Coleridge changed Southey from a bookish but desultory boy into a strenuous man of letters; Scott, though he no doubt knew its powers, owed the popular metre of his early poems directly to a chance hearing of *Christabel*, read from a manuscript copy long before its publication; and Hazlitt, afterwards his bitter enemy and one of the bitterest writers of his day, has left almost a rhapsody of eulogy of Coleridge's powers, and confessed that he was the only person from whom he (Hazlitt) learnt anything. The student has been repeatedly cautioned against attributing too much to the action and influence of individuals, but he can go less wrong in that direction here than almost anywhere. Almost may we say that Coleridge was the English romantic

movement, Coleridge was the inspirer of nineteenth-century literature. And yet (for it is worth repetition as perhaps the most glaring paradox, and certainly one of the most memorable lessons and warnings in literary history) Coleridge has left us just one finished poem of perfect quality, and just one prose work which is (and that not wholly) worthy of his powers.

**The principles of the *Lyrical Ballads***

The general effect of this remarkable influence of his talk, of his personality, and of the few documents in which he allowed it to find literary expression, was furthered, reproduced, and extended by all the writers mentioned above and many others. The most complete of these documents in poetry was the only important contribution which he gave to the *Lyrical Ballads* themselves (*Christabel* and other things which ought to have been there being, as usual, not ready), *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. This poem itself was at first little understood and less liked, the eighteenth-century spirit, even in Southey, being still strong enough to make it seem a "Dutch attempt at German sublimity," as he called it, and "a cock-and-bull story," as others did. The critics contrasted its metre—the full equivalenced ballad stanza with extension of lines at pleasure—with the "sweet and polished" measures of Dryden, Pope, and Gray. And Wordsworth's splendid blank verse *Lines on Tintern Abbey*, which closed the volume as *The Ancient Mariner* had opened it, were, though less disliked (for the critics were accustomed to blank verse, and there was no archaic language, supernatural incident, or the like to disturb them), hardly more understood. Now *The Ancient Mariner* and *Tintern Abbey* together almost supply in little a survey of what Romantic poetry was going to be. Imagination was to have free play, and no longer to be confined to "ideas furnished by the senses." Language was to be selected, not according to the rules of an

arbitrary and stale "poetic diction," but solely for its better adaptation to the feelings and aims of the poet. Metre, instead of being confined to a few, and those rather stiff and narrow, forms, was to recover the great old English liberty in equivalence and substitution of feet, line-arrangement, and rhyme. An intense appreciation of Nature was to supplement rather than to oust, but in supplementing to deepen and widen immensely, that "study of man" which, in the narrowest sense, had been alone admitted as proper for mankind. The governing ideal of the poet was no longer to choose subjects or modes of expression by authority or rule; but (as Coleridge afterwards expressed it in reference to his own and Wordsworth's intentions) on the one hand, when touching unfamiliar objects, to procure "that willing suspension of disbelief which constitutes poetic faith," on the other, when dealing with things familiar, to "awaken the mind's attention from the lethargy of custom."

"Sweetness" was certainly not to be slighted, but "polish" in the Pope sense might take its chance. In the same passage Coleridge was to compare the poet's effect to the "sudden charm which moonlight or sunset diffuses over a known and familiar landscape." Now this was a conception of poetry of which, as such, the eighteenth century and the whole Augustan age had never dreamt, and which it would certainly have repudiated. Dryden had been able to reach it now and then from his older inspiration. Collins had reached it frequently, Gray sometimes, Blake continually, Burns not seldom. But Pope's scheme absolutely excluded anything of the kind. The questions of the future were to be:—"Can you realise the unfamiliar and *dis*realise the familiar in the sense of the two principles above given? And when you have done this, can you put the

result in metrical language[1] of as beautiful, varied, and expressive forms as possible, with as much appeal as may be to the mind's eye and ear ?"

and of Coleridge's other work.

Coleridge, as has been said, unluckily did not do very much to carry into practice the ideas so admirably expressed; but some of what he did was consummate, and, unlike *The Ancient Mariner*, it borrowed nothing from mere archaism and less from the purely supernatural. *Christabel* and *Kubla Khan* are, the one an unfinished romance with still something of the supernatural in it, the other the mere beginning of a poem, said to have been suggested by or composed in a dream, and reading very much like one. But, tantalising as they may be, they contain more of the spirit of poetry pure and simple than even *The Ancient Mariner* itself. In *Kubla Khan* especially, Coleridge has given an object-lesson in the differences between poetry and prose, by taking for his opening an actual prose passage of an Elizabethan travel-book, putting it in metre, and slightly altering the diction. In *Christabel* he has revived—scarcely, it would seem, knowing what he did, and imagining that he was making a new accentual metre—the old equivalenced octosyllabic couplet of *Genesis and Exodus* and of Spenser's *February*. And he taught this particular metre to Scott, to Byron, and to others; while the principles of it, applied to metre generally, restored the vitality of English poetry.

Wordsworth.

Wordsworth had no lessons of this kind to give; in fact his ideas, both as to diction and to metre, were very different from Coleridge's, though he could often write very fine blank verse and sometimes equally fine lyrical poetry of the statelier kind, such as the famous *Ode on Recollections of Immortality*, as well as admirable sonnets. When he tried trisyllabic measures, or light verse of any

[1] For Wordsworth's ideas on this, see below.

kind, he was apt to be singsong and trivial. His forte was a certain class of subject—the description of natural objects and the effect (a kind of adoration) which they produced on him—and the treatment of it in a peculiar spirit of his own. Even here he was not invariably to be trusted, for certain crotchets of his about the "language of rustics" being the best for poetry, with an occasional selection of trivial matters upon which to employ this, were unfortunate. But no one has ever carried further that devotion to nature just mentioned, that tendency to regard and to expound natural objects and effects as manifestations of a Divine Presence, not merely deserving man's attention and almost his worship, but capable of teaching, inspiring, healing troubles, and the like. He has put his beliefs — certainly with no rustic language—in the two magnificent poems above named and in many others; and with all his inequality—for long stretches of his poems differ only from prose in possessing a sort of undistinguished metre—he not only contributed to English literature fine poems, but almost[1] instilled into it a new spirit and phase of poetry.

Scott. The influence and character of Scott were of an entirely different kind. Wordsworth was a very bad narrator, took little interest in literature as literature, or indeed in any subject but Nature and his own poetry, and kept inveterately out of the world. Scott was emphatically a man of action as well as of letters, an enormous reader, enthusiastically devoted to mediaeval history and literature, a professional lawyer (first in actual practice and then in an official post for many years), social, many-sided. He began with translations and imitations from the German, that cause of revolt (see above, p. 174) having special influence on him. But

[1] "Almost," for, as has been said, Cowper had anticipated him to some extent in *Yardley Oak*.

the vast stores of Scottish and other legend and romance which he had accumulated required some outlet, and the casual hearing of *Christabel*, above noticed, gave clearer form to hints which he, to a much larger extent than Coleridge himself, must have taken from the original romances. In 1805, seven years after the *Lyrical Ballads*, appeared the famous *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, which almost at once, and still rather in spite of the critics, seized the public ear. Scott's unsurpassed faculty of story-telling, the brilliant and lively character of the verse, the unfamiliar and striking incidents, above all a characteristic well put by the great statesman William Pitt, then just at the close of his life, more than accounted for this. Pitt, who though a scholar was not usually much interested in modern literature, observed that he could have expected the scenes of the *Lay* from a painter but not from a poet. There is nothing perhaps which better expresses one side of the new poetry—its appeal directly to the mind's eye—and the contrast of its varied and brilliant word-painting when compared with the drab-coloured, dry, and if not crude, almost wholly intellectual character of so much eighteenth-century work.

Scott kept up the general system, though he varied the particular metres, in the unprecedentedly popular and even more unprecedentedly influential poems which followed—*Marmion*, *The Lady of the Lake*, *Rokeby*, *The Lord of the Isles*, etc.—till he gave up verse for prose, and, escaping from the competition of Byron, achieved in the new field an even greater triumph than in the old. But in all his work he constantly inserted admirable lyrics, often in the more dashing style, as in "Bonnie Dundee" and "Young Lochinvar," where he re-established the anapaestic measure for good and all in English verse; sometimes in a remoter, quieter, but

even more precious and exquisite fashion, as in "Proud Maisie." His volume and the rapidity of his composition made these perfect things comparatively rare; but the student, however far he pursues his studies, will never keep the right road if he allows himself to think Scott an inferior poet.

Southey. Southey was perhaps better as a prose-writer (see below) than as a poet; but his poetry joined that of the others in producing a great effect at the time, and it was ranked highly even by some who, for political or personal reasons, disliked its author. People now know little of it except a few short pieces—"Blenheim" and "The Inchcape Rock" and "The Well of St. Keyne" in light, tripping, or swinging rhythm, and the beautiful "Holly Tree" and "My days among the dead are past" in a higher and more serious style. But some of his longer poems, though now almost unread, were powerful in their day, and ought to be read by any one who would thoroughly appreciate English poetry. The unrhymed *Thalaba the Destroyer* and the rhymed but irregularly versed *Curse of Kehama* are by far the finest. In the rest he was too prone to adopt a blank verse nearly as prosaic as Wordsworth's at its worst and never near that at its best. But the subjects and treatment of all—the wild Eastern stories of *Thalaba* and *Kehama*, the chivalrous ones of *Joan of Arc* and *Madoc* and *Roderick the Goth*, all helped to shake the public out of its rut of modern "polished" common-sense notions. He made, indeed, a mistake in trying to write English hexameters. But more than twenty years earlier he had intimated distinctly, not merely in practice but in theory, and in terms far more correct than Coleridge's later, the great secret of English verse, the equivalence of two short syllables to one long one, and the liberty of substituting the two for the one.

To these four most influential poets, born in the "seventies" of the eighteenth century, at least three others, who date from the same decade, should be joined, though they were not entirely at one with the new school, and had classical leanings of various kinds. Thomas Campbell (1777–1844), indeed, in his longer poems, was almost wholly an eighteenth-century poet. But his two greater songs, "Hohenlinden" and "The Battle of the Baltic," with some minor pieces, are essentially romantic in subject, metre, and other points. Thomas Moore (1779–1852) was master of a couplet, satiric and other, which smacked very strongly of the older ways. But his most famous long poem, *Lalla Rookh*, though not of the finest, purest Romantic kind in spirit or handling, went all the way with the new school in subject; and his very numerous lyrics (most of them written to Irish or other airs, including some of the poet's own, for Moore was a skilled musician) were quite unlike eighteenth-century work, had immense popular influence, and include some things of real and lasting beauty, such as "Oft in the stilly night," "I saw from the beach," and "When in death I shall calm recline." In particular, their complicated metres, which adopt the most unusual (though generally justifiable) variations and licenses, were, considering the popularity just mentioned, a most powerful instrument in correcting the mistaken limitations of the older school.

Campbell.

Moore.

Very different from these was Walter Savage Landor (1775–1864). In the best sense, he was more of a "classic" than any English poet since Milton, or perhaps Gray, for he was a thorough scholar, and followed, in his verse at least, the classical practice of simple forms, straightforward expression, and economy of words. But though there was mannerism in him there was no convention, and though there was something of Dryden

Landor.

there was nothing of Pope. His first long poem, *Gebir* (1798), showed the peculiarity of his position; but many of his lyrics are even more curious examples of Romantic spirit in classical form.

The eighteenth-century leaven which has been noticed as continuing to show itself in all these does not appear at all in the two younger, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats, of the great trio who succeed, and are themselves influenced by, the Lake School or by Scott. How much of the older temper there really was in the Byron. third and eldest, Byron, it is impossible to say. It is certain that, except in a few metrical respects, none of his own best work is in the least like that of the "Augustan" masters whom he professedly admired. His earliest poems, *Hours of Idleness* (1807) and *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), with one or two later pieces, no doubt show their influence; but the poems which brought him his popularity from *Childe Harold* (1812) onwards were, if not of the purest Romantic spirit, of the now almost fashionable Romantic costume and subject. Scott's or Spenser's metre for form; foreign travel, adventure, etc., for matter; and the peculiar attempted blend of passion, misanthropy, and what may be called mental and moral indigestion, which the Germans had concocted during their period of what they call "Storm and Stress," which Mrs. Radcliffe and the Terror novelists had borrowed, and which was one of the stage "properties" of popular Romanticism—all these appear in Byron. He had a great facility and not a little force in writing, an intense interest in himself (a poet must always have an interest in something), varied and picturesque experiences of scene and action, perhaps some real passion, and great intellectual ability, especially in the direction of witty narrative and description. Some of his best passages are really great in their way;

and much of his last work, the extensive but unfinished comic epic of *Don Juan*, is not easily to be surpassed in its kind. For better or for worse he took England by storm for a time, and the Continent for a much longer time; and though it is almost impossible, when he is read with Coleridge or Wordsworth, Shelley or Keats, to think that he can belong to the same school, he was one of the chief forces which made a breach for Romanticism in the fortress-walls of custom and prejudice.

**Shelley and Keats.** On the other hand, Shelley and Keats made little impression at home for the time; and, until quite recently, none whatever abroad; yet generation after generation of English critics, from points of view sometimes very different and almost opposed, have attributed greater and greater importance to them. From one or from both of them almost every poet of real merit since has drawn inspiration; and it has been more and more recognised that, while both represent nineteenth-century poetry, they represent it in two different and strikingly contrasted ways. Both may be said, though they were actually born a little within the frontier of the eighteenth century, to have altogether escaped the critical ideas prevalent in it. For both, when they began to write, the great Romantic poets already noticed were part of the literary influences that affected them; and both were in a position to avail themselves, if they chose, of that rediscovery of older English literature, backwards from 1660, which had been going on with accelerated motion during the eighteenth century itself.

**Shelley.** Shelley, the higher born of the two, in easier circumstances, stronger in health, and more regularly educated than Keats, was also the more strictly original, though at first he might not seem so. He began, however, as some others of the greatest poets have done, with quite

worthless and imitative work in verse, and in prose with two of the slightest and silliest novels of the now stale Terror school, *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*. When, in *Queen Mab*, he turned to somewhat better things, he borrowed Southey's rhymeless scheme in *Thalaba*, and his first stanza is obviously based on the elder poet's. Even in *Alastor* (1815), the first of his really great poems, his blank verse is evidently suggested by Wordsworth's in some degree. But already in this, and still more later, everything that he did became Shelley's work and nobody else's. What the subject was mattered very little: extravagantly revolutionary ideas in politics, religion, and morals; incoherent romances of adventure illustrating these; dramas, songs, and mystical adaptations of classical myths—all turn to a glorious effect of poetry, often indistinctly outlined, but always bathed in splendid hazes of light and colour. Once only perhaps, in the great Elizabethan drama of *The Cenci*, does Shelley present a solid substance of narrated or dramatised action. In one of the finest and most characteristic of his longer poems, *The Witch of Atlas*, there is hardly any substance at all—only a tissue of most beautiful dream. Another, *Adonais*, though the subject—the actual death of Keats—gives it more apparent reality, streams off, in the same manner, into gorgeous if sometimes dim imaginings which are poetry pure and simple, like *Kubla Khan* itself. If there is any drawback to this characteristic, which certainly makes Shelley, like Spenser, rather a poet's and poet-lover's poet than one for the average person, it must necessarily show less in short lyrics, where solid substance is not expected. And few competent critics deny that, taking volume and quality together, Shelley is the greatest lyric poet in English, if not the greatest in the world's literature. But even his wife, herself a woman of genius and loyal to her husband as few wives

have been, complained of a certain "want of human interest" in some of his work.

Keats. There was nothing thus "remote and afar" in the poetry of Keats; and he differed from Shelley in many other ways. At no time was his verse so feeble as Shelley's earliest; and this was no doubt partly due to the fact that, from the very first, he was not only a spontaneous singer but an earnest student of his own art. As a mere boy he fell in with the Elizabethans, and was delighted with them; later he came, for a time, under the influence of Leigh Hunt (see below), a small poet but no small critic. Keats deliberately took up the cudgels against Pope, Pope's master the great French critic and satirist Boileau, and the ideas of the classical school generally. And when he published his first long poem, *Endymion* (1818), he took one of the most certain ways of shocking the still mainly neo-classically-minded critics of the time, by adopting the overlapped heroic couplet of Marmion and Chamberlayne (see above, p. 110). It made them furious; and there is no doubt that Keats did to some extent succumb to its peculiar temptations (see above, as before) of verbiage and incoherence. Even Shelley doubted whether anybody could get to the end of the poem for the difficulties that the author had interposed. Yet the verse at its best is extraordinarily beautiful; the story, though not clear or full, and the characters, though not elaborate, appeal to human emotions, and above all the poem swarms with pictures, exquisite alike in colour and in form, in figure and in scene-painting. But Keats was nothing if not critical in practice, if he had not much time to be critical in theory, and he saw the faults of *Endymion*. To correct them he tried the octave stanza-form in *Isabella*, and with still better results, an exceedingly bold reversion, in heroic couplet, to the joint manners of Milton

and Dryden—Miltonisms in language and the Drydenian licenses of Alexandrine and triplet—in *Lamia*. In his last long poem, *Hyperion*, attempted in two forms but finished in neither, he tried blank verse and, perhaps necessarily, fell back upon Milton only for model. He did great things there also. *The Eve of St. Agnes* [1] is a short poem in Spenserians which is almost faultless; and the unfinished *Eve of St. Mark* is an adaptation of the rare best form of Gower's octosyllables, which nobody save Gower had tried, which Gower himself could not have gone anywhere near, and which was afterwards taken up, with admirable results, by Mr. William Morris. But Keats would not have been the nineteenth-century poet which, in all but birth, he was eminently, if he had not also applied himself to lyric, and he would not have been the great poet that he was if he had not succeeded in it. His lyrics are not so numerous as Shelley's, but he never goes wrong either in song measures such as "In a drear nighted December," in ballads like "La Belle Dame sans Merci," in the more stately ode arrangements like the famous "Grecian Urn" and its companions, or in his few but admirable sonnets.

Their joint though various influence, and its character.

Perhaps there is something in this studiousness of Keats—in the way in which, without in the least copying or borrowing in the lower sense of these words, he returns to the greater examples of elder English poetry, takes lessons from them, and continues them independently, which accounts for his enormous influence on his successors. Keats "fished the murex up"—that is to say, rediscovered the secret of colour in verse—said Browning. The close affiliation of Tennyson to Keats

[1] This, with the others just mentioned and some odes, etc., appeared in 1820: *The Eve of St. Mark* and (at least as collected) "La Belle Dame sans Merci" were posthumous.

has escaped no competent student; and through Tennyson a directly traced connection with the pre-Raphælite school (see next chapter) is patent. And this gives him a peculiar place in any history of English literature, even on the smallest scale.

But, even in such a history, there is something more to be said of him and of Shelley. They, between them, were the first fully to develop the two great principles which have distinguished our poetry from 1798 to the present day from that of the period from 1660 to 1798. These principles are the increased appeal to the mind's eye, and the increased appeal to the mind's ear.

Eighteenth-century poets—with exceptions of course, but with exceptions which prove the rule—had, as has been said, addressed themselves almost wholly to the intellect, with a certain very limited supplement of address to such emotions as were recognised as proper and normal, and another to a still more limited "taste" which amused itself with expression strictly regulated according to authority and classical pattern. With what is styled "aesthetic" appeal, that is, appeal to what may be called the senses of the mind, they would have very little to do. They circumscribed the endless possibilities of the use of sound in language and metre as closely as they could; and it is hardly before Cowper, not at all (except in fragments) before Thomson, that we can find an elaborate and vividly felt picture of scene in verse.

With regard to the latter point, Pitt's surprise at the pictorial effects of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* has been quoted; but, though precaution as to undervaluing Scott must be repeated, Scott's effects are little more than scene-painting in the lower sense compared to Wordsworth's pictures of things seen, Coleridge's of

things imagined, Shelley's of things dreamt, Keats's of things seen, imagined, dreamt, and *felt*. So too in regard to sound. Whole realms of aesthetic suggestion, which the older school had deliberately ignored or shut off, were opened to the poet and his readers. The vocabulary allowed was enormously increased in mere words: the stock use of them, and of phrase, was avoided. Instead of a very few metres, reduced to their simplest and most monotonous terms, the poet was left to recover, discover, or invent any combinations of foot and line that he could induce to pass the muster of general English poetic laws as they are shown, for instance, in Shakespeare and Milton. And in handling these he was given a large though not unlimited license of equivalence and substitution. He was allowed and encouraged to play on similar or contrasted vowel-sounds like a musician on notes. He could cut his lines, or stretch them, to any extent that the ear admitted. Add to this the vastly widened range of subject, and the complete abolition of arbitrary rules about literary "kinds," and some idea may be formed of the increased inheritance and powers upon which the nineteenth-century poet entered.

**The novel: Transition writers.**

The influence of this great wave of the rising tide of thought and feeling was hardly less remarkable in prose fiction; but it was exercised in a curiously different fashion, and though the changes effected were almost equally momentous, they were effected by far fewer persons—in fact by two only, one of whom for a long time had no disciples. This was due, no doubt, to the much more recent origin of the novel, and to the fact that, while the poet was enabled to go back to the great sources and patterns of Elizabethan and mediaeval literature, only the latter, which was not easily accessible, could do much for the writer of romances, and even that

could do little for the novelist proper. A slight glance was made, in the last chapter, at the fortunes of fiction after the four great novelists had started it on its way. It had, though still rather looked down on, never ceased to be extremely popular; and therefore, as all popular literature must be, it was very largely produced. Miss Burney had struck the vein of strictly ordinary life in *Evelina*, but had not worked it far. The Terror and the Revolutionary novels had not done much, though the former had largely increased the element of description; and both had somewhat deepened the exploration of character. Quite at the close of the century Maria Edgeworth (1767–1849) took up and bettered Smollett's utilising of the "national" sources in her charming Irish stories, and advanced upon Miss Burney somewhat in books of ordinary life; but it may be questioned whether she was not at her very best in tales intended for children. Of the two great novelists referred to above, Jane Austen (1775–1817), who was to distance both these literary elder sisters of hers, could not get published for some time; and although Scott tried prose fiction early, he threw it aside for a time, to profit by the extraordinary popularity of his verse-stories.

When this popularity began a little to wane, he bethought him of his abandoned attempts in prose, looked them up, and produced *Waverley* (1814), a book which at once revolutionised fiction, and established, in secure existence, a kind of literature which had been more or less unsuccessfully attempted at rare intervals for at least two thousand years—the Historical Novel. The causes of this failure can only be slightly summarised here; the chief of them was the absence, not so much of actual historical knowledge in the ordinary sense, as of an extension of that knowledge to the literature, habits, ways, etc., of former times. Just before Scott, Scott.

Mrs. Radcliffe and Godwin,[1] both persons of unusual ability, had made the most absurd mistakes for want of this extension or combination. Now Scott knew a very great deal about all the things of which knowledge was required; his poetical work had already shown exceptional powers, both of telling a story and of fitting it with proper scenery, etc. And he was now to prove that he possessed another all-important faculty, the faculty of making conversation, and telling his story through it, as no other novelist, not even Fielding, had previously done. Incidentally, he at first adopted from Smollett and Miss Edgeworth the "national" appeal, and the first batch of his novels, which were produced in extraordinarily rapid succession, was devoted to Scotland, while in the second and third of these (*Guy Mannering* and *The Antiquary*) he showed that the historical setting was by no means necessary to him. Later, he passed to purely English history in *Ivanhoe* and *Kenilworth*, to foreign in *Quentin Durward* and others. And though his almost incredible industry and fertility of production, his broken health (no doubt partly due to this overpressure), and severe financial troubles towards the close of his career slightly affected his later works, yet, even if these had been much worse than they were, they would have sufficed to give patterns of a new and almost inexhaustible kind of fiction.

**Miss Austen.** Meanwhile Miss Austen[2] was doing parallel work in another kind, not so new, not perhaps so popular, but astonishingly renovated, and more inexhaustible even

[1] William Godwin (1756–1836) is best known as a political philosopher (*Political Justice*, 1793), who preached a sort of amiable anarchism, and exercised, for a time, extraordinary influence on his juniors. But he was also a novelist: his most famous books being *Caleb Williams* (1794) and *St. Leon* (1799).

[2] Her novels—*Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, etc.—were *published* between 1811 and 1818. But some of them had been written before the close of the eighteenth century.

than the other. Scott's form was the romance, largely indeed supplied with pure novel-quality—in character, conversation, and so on—but mainly dealing with incident, and more or less startling incident. Miss Austen's was the novel of strictly ordinary life—the scheme, in fact, of Miss Burney and Miss Edgeworth, but even more self-denying than theirs in respect of anything "out-of-the-way." The woes of a girl at a dance when her thoughtless partner has deserted her; the appearance of a village street seen from the door of the village shop; the question whether the heroine shall walk or drive to a dinner-party at the edge of her uncle's park; the pompous patronage of a country great lady; a walk through the streets of Bath with the chance whether the right person will turn up or not—to these things did Miss Austen (with an audacity which we fail to realise now because people have been doing the things after her for a century) exclusively incline. But, possessing a literary genius of which Miss Burney had not a tenth nor Miss Edgeworth a quarter, she managed to infuse it into the treatment of all of them; to create characters which are as much alive as Shakespeare's or Fielding's and more "modern"; to set them working in the quietest but most unerring fashion; and to suffuse both their conversation and her own narrative with a peculiar quiet irony, a little like Addison's, but more evasive and of a finer quality—in fact, a counterpart of Swift's in power, with all the savagery, and the gloom, and the coarseness taken out.

**Significance of their work.**

It is of the first importance for the student of literature, from the historical side, not to be content with the fact that Scott wrote a large and Miss Austen a small number of interesting novels, but to see and understand how these novels led the way in each case to a practically unlimited production of their respective kinds for the

future. It does not matter that Scott's line, though followed at once, was not very well followed for a long time, or that, for a time almost as long, Miss Austen's was scarcely followed at all. The point is that here were two kinds of fiction which, without any mere slavish copying or duplicating, *could* be followed up indefinitely. The range of the historical novel, though not quite unlimited, is exceedingly large, and that of the novel of ordinary life is absolutely unlimited. It could have been seen by any good critic then, and it has been abundantly proved since, that no material of actual life is uninteresting if it is treated in the right manner; and that if it is treated in the right manner, it will interest not only the age in and about which it is written but all other ages. But the further development of the novel had better be reserved for the next chapter. Nothing very great was done in it after Miss Austen's early death, and before the limit of this, except by Scott himself, whose whole life and work all but touched that limit.

Criticism: extensive cultivation of it.

The next most important development of the Romantic movement was Criticism—like the novel, if not a new at least a renovated and largely developed product. There had indeed been a good deal of it during the eighteenth century, and in the hands of Addison and Johnson, if in no others, it had had some vogue. But it had never been exactly popular; and in the earlier part of the century at least, the periodical of the *Spectator* kind had not been developed enough to stimulate its production, though such periodicals as there were gave it a home. Later, however (as was noticed in the summary of the last chapter), regular "reviews" of something like the modern kind, the chief being the *Critical* and the *Monthly*, came into existence; and, both in these and in independent publications, a large and brilliant company of writers, often poets themselves and always interested in poetry,

took part. It has already been mentioned that Coleridge practically re-created the art in English. Even Wordsworth made not too fortunate excursions into it. If Scott had not been so great, as a poet and a novelist, he would still have held no small place in literature for his criticism, which is abundant, and has hardly any defect but the rare one of excessive good nature. Southey was a professional critic for nearly the whole of his life, and in the practice of criticism developed his wonderful prose style. Landor wrote criticism which was crotchety, but learned and sometimes acute. Byron would probably have been a very good critic if he had been less wilfully wayward.[1] Shelley wrote an admirable if rather abstract *Defence of Poetry*; and in both his and Keats's letters there are frequent signs of critical power. But the critics wholly, or mainly so, of the period besides Coleridge (most of them, as has been said, owing much to him), are Lamb, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, and Francis Jeffrey (1773–1850) among the elder writers, John Wilson (1785–1854) ("Christopher North"), John Gibson Lockhart (1794–1854 ?), and De Quincey among the younger. All these, except Jeffrey, were on the Romantic side; but there was unfortunately about this time a great deal of political rancour which overflowed into criticism, and sometimes made critics untrue to their strict literary creed, while sometimes also innovators in politics were genuine conservatives in literature and *vice versa*. Jeffrey would probably always have been unjust to Scott and to Wordsworth, whatever their politics; but Keats, the worst treated of all, undoubtedly paid the penalty, not of his own political views, which were neither strong nor obtrusive, but of those of his friends.

[1] He took a part in one of the stages of the dispute (see above, p. 151) whether Pope was a poet; and though he took on the whole the wrong side, he said some very shrewd things.

Jeffrey and his periodical, the *Edinburgh Review* (started 1802), began this on the Whig side by attacks on the "Lake" poets, who, though at first favouring revolutionary ideas, had become staunch Conservatives; but the practice was unfortunately taken up, and retorted with an increase of acerbity, by Lockhart, Wilson, and others on the Tory side in the *Quarterly Review* (1809) and *Blackwood's Magazine* (1817), and specially by two men, one elder and one younger, William Gifford (1756–1826) and John Wilson Croker (1780–1857), who can only be mentioned here.[1] Hazlitt was perhaps worse than either in allowing not merely political but social and personal jealousy to colour his criticism. But he was the greatest of the set next to Coleridge, if not sometimes his equal and even superior, and his power of essay-writing, both critical and other, has never been surpassed. In general discussions of poetry, in reviews of individual authors, and in the miscellaneous pieces referred to, Hazlitt has the true "aestheticism"—that is to say, he can enjoy, and express his enjoyment of, a work of literature or art as other people can enjoy, but can generally not express their enjoyment of, things which submit themselves more directly to the bodily senses. To Hazlitt a poem, a play, a novel is what are to others agreeable food, delicious wine, a lovely face, a grand or charming prospect, an exquisite perfume, a stirring or soothing piece of music. There had been a

Hazlitt

[1] The two notorious articles on Keats and Tennyson in the *Quarterly*, the authorship of which was long debated, are now known to be Croker's. Gifford did some useful work on bad poets in the late eighteenth century, and edited Jonson, Massinger, and (in part) Shirley most creditably; but towards contemporaries he lost all but political sympathy, and became a mere carper. Croker was a man of talent, and did not fully deserve the obloquy which, for different reasons, he received at the hands of men so different as Macaulay, Thackeray, and Lord Beaconsfield; but, merely as a critic, he was both short-sighted and savage.

little of this before in Dryden, and perhaps in Gray, but hardly anything in any one else. To him the Italian word *gusto*—which is not so much our " taste " as taste intensified or rapturous, and which he often used—was early applied, and he deserved it.

**Lamb.** Lamb had less energy, a more delicate and fitful appreciation, and a narrower range, while he had also, during the greater part of his life, much regular business work to do, and was troubled by mental disease in his family which occasionally affected himself, while Hazlitt was wholly a man of letters, and, though he died early, a strong man. Lamb's work is not large in bulk, but it is exquisite in quality, and the famous *Essays of Elia*, which are only in part literary, have perhaps more definitely marked originality than anything of Hazlitt's. His selections from, and short appreciations of, Elizabethan drama are the very finest things of their kind, and have exercised immense influence since ; while he has a power, which is almost unique in literature, of attracting by his writings a sort of personal affection. Happy is the student who comes to know and to love Lamb early : he will seldom go wrong in literary matters afterwards.

**Leigh Hunt.** Leigh Hunt had less genius than either of these, but is by no means an unimportant person in our history. He was a poet as well as a prose-writer ; and in both capacities he did things which were very influential. As was noted, Keats was no doubt for a time strongly affected by Hunt's theories of poetical criticism and by his studies in poetry. In prose, on the other hand, no single person did so much to change the old, rather formal, and now somewhat obsolete *Spectator*-model of Essay into the kind which exists at the present day. In these Essays, of which he wrote many volumes, chiefly in periodicals (indeed he once emulated Defoe's feat by

writing one wholly himself), he dealt with almost every conceivable variety of subject. But a very large number of them were literary, and though Hunt had neither the strength of Hazlitt nor the delicacy of Lamb, while in intellectual depth and range he cannot even be mentioned with Coleridge, he had a wider scope than either of his two friends, for Hazlitt knew little or nothing but English, and Lamb cared little for anything else. Hunt was a good Italian and a fair French scholar, and helped, in this way also, to accomplish that broadening and varying of literary patterns, interests, and so forth which our literature required, and which it was one of the great functions of the Romantic movement to supply.

Historians, their number and importance.

This same influence and character of study displayed itself in all the other branches of literature at the time. The great historical achievement of Gibbon was indeed not repeated; it is doubtful whether it ever will be. But his example was followed in all directions by men of industry and talent, if not of genius, and sometimes of genius in a lesser degree. Southey applied that prose style of his which has been mentioned before, and which is the very perfection of plainer but not too plain English prose—still hardly in the slightest degree obsolete or even old-fashioned, dignified, but not elaborately rhythmical—in several histories—of *Brazil*, of the *Peninsular War*, etc., and in historical biographies of which the *Life of Nelson* is an acknowledged masterpiece, while that of *Wesley* is not much inferior. William Mitford (1744–1827), who was also our first really well-informed and thorough-going writer on versification, produced a remarkable though not faultless *History of Greece*. William Roscoe (1753–1831), in another direction, did work of great influence on the Italian Renaissance with his lives of *Lorenzo de Medici* and *Leo X.*

And an invaluable group, Sharon Turner (1768–1847), John Lingard (1771–1851), and Sir Francis Palgrave (1788–1861), for almost the first time, treated English history itself thoroughly by going to sources and documents; for though Hume had far excelled all earlier historians in literary merit, his brilliant composition had been partisan, inaccurate, and superficial. Henry Hallam (1777–1859), too, deserves particular notice here, because he was the first to combine serious study of general and of literary history. His works had long titles, but what are known for shortness as his *Middle Ages* (1818), *Constitutional History of England* (1827), and *Literature of Europe* (1839) showed this combination in a way comparatively unique up to the time, and positively excellent. Even men whose principal work was of different kind, like Scott, Campbell, Moore, and Hazlitt, wrote histories. Of greater importance here was Henry Hart Milman (1791–1868), who devoted himself to ecclesiastical history, writing on that of the Jews and the early Christians, works which led up to his great history of *Latin Christianity* (1856). The new classical histories, revolutionising popular conceptions on their subjects, of Arnold, Thirlwall, and Grote, were a little later than these, but may be grouped with them.

The characteristics of nineteenth-century *belles lettres*.

What has been said on the four great branches of what used to be called *belles lettres*—poetry, prose fiction, criticism and other essay-writing, and history—should perhaps be cross-summarised here[1] that the student may understand the full interest and importance of the period. Now, as in the Elizabethan time, but with much fuller knowledge to assist them, if not now quite so universal a diffusion of genius to utilise it, men helped each other in the general task of renovating and re-creating and

[1] The characteristics here mentioned will be found even more developed in the next chapter. For *belles lettres* see *Glossary*.

extending literature. The historians furnished the poets and the novelists with fresh and infinitely varied subjects; the poets and the novelists in their turn taught the historians not to treat their subjects in the dry chronicle manner, nor in the less dry but superficial fashion of the party pamphlet; but to try and bring out the human and the picturesque elements so as to make history alive. The critics and the essay-writers took all this poetry, fiction, history as their province also, and refashioned it anew, commented on it, prepared it for general consumption and enjoyment.

And all this was enormously assisted by the multiplication of the new periodicals. The very juxtaposition of articles on various subjects in these facilitated a community of literary interest, and helped to do away with that "boxing off" of kinds and departments which had been one of the greatest faults of the neo-classic period. Poems (except in the so-called "Reviews"[1]) from the first, prose fiction pretty soon, critical and other essays necessarily and naturally, found a home in these periodicals; and if larger histories could hardly do so, most historians got into the habit of contributing to them studies on episodes or parts of their subjects which could be conveniently separated.

Theology, philosophy, science. Influence of the periodical in all departments.

In some other departments advance was delayed or hindered, at least from the purely literary point of view. We said little of sermons, or of theological writing generally, during the eighteenth century, for after Berkeley there was little or nothing of real literary merit to notice; and though there was still much sermon-writing and

[1] The distinction between "Review" and "Magazine" has been long neglected, but it had a reasonable origin. The "Review," as its name properly imported, was confined to *discussion* of politics, literature, and what not: the "Magazine," with the same justification, was a store-house which received and distributed all kinds of literature—poems, stories, essays, criticisms, etc.

reading, the stuff of it was dry in every sense. Nor, though the controversy between orthodoxy and unorthodoxy produced some famous books, especially Butler's *Analogy* (mentioned above) in earlier and Paley's *Evidences* (1794) in later years, was either of these, or any other such book, of much literary value. The Evangelical revival was not a literary one, though it produced some beautiful hymns from Cowper, Charles Wesley, and others; and the great Oxford Movement, which was to be very literary indeed, did not begin till quite the close of the period of this chapter. In philosophy, Coleridge—so often to be mentioned first as pioneer—had been again the first to acquaint himself with the great new developments which Kant, taking his own start from Hume, had begun in Germany. But to no subject were Coleridge's unsystematic habits, his lack of clear style, and his inability to finish what he began, more fatal; and though much was to be done after him, and in a way through his influence, little was done by him. Moreover philosophy, which had in ancient times, and since the Renaissance if not in the Middle Ages, been also something like a branch of *belles lettres*, and which in the eighteenth century had specially endeavoured to adapt itself to ordinary comprehension, now tended, in consequence mainly of this Germanising, to become a specialised science with an abstruse terminology. So, too, the great advances in the physical sciences tended more and more to draw their practitioners away from literature. Yet even here the periodical exercised some of the peculiar influence which was indicated above, and helped to popularise the more unpopular departments.

**Reasons for division at this point**

In some senses there has been no actual break, in the movement inaugurated by Coleridge and Wordsworth, from their time till the present day; but there is, about

the reign of William the Fourth, a rather notable division line between the generation which first worked that movement out and those which followed. In the year 1835 Wordsworth, who was himself to live for a good many years longer, wrote a poem, almost the last striking thing that he did, on the death of James Hogg (1770–1835), the "Ettrick Shepherd," a friend of Scott's, a vain and unsettled sort of person, but possessed of real gifts both as poet and as story-teller. He took occasion, however, also to notice the recent departure of far more important men;[1] Scott himself, Charles Lamb, Coleridge above all, Crabbe, and the poetess Mrs. Hemans (1793–1835), a pathetic and respectable verse-writer of a class that we have had no room to discuss at length here. Byron, Keats, and Shelley, though so much younger than most of these, had gone years earlier. Southey was to live some time longer, but not in full possession of his powers. Moreover, remarkable representatives of a fresh stage, Tennyson, Browning, Carlyle, Thackeray, Dickens, had already begun or were just beginning to write. So that a real gap, though not so deep in kind as that which we noted at 1660 and 1798, as far as principles were concerned—a gap at least between personalities—is apparent as one looks back at this point.

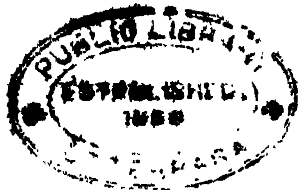
The reality of Victorian literature

Moreover this gap coincided with the beginning of one of the longest and, for the greater part of it, in literature at least of the most glorious reigns that any English sovereign has enjoyed, while some of the greatest writers who had just begun continued till nearly the end of that reign. Victorian literature is almost more of a real thing in fact, and less of a misnomer in name, than any term of the same kind, and we may justly, however inadequately, treat it in a single chapter.

[1] The exact dates will be found above at the first mention of their names.

From this point onward it becomes almost impossible to record, in any satisfactory manner, *individual* accessions of notable books and authors to the English Library. Nor is it so necessary, or even so advantageous, as in former cases, because these books and authors are, in cases where they would deserve special notice here, still in what may be called "general circulation," and will become known, more or less as a matter of course, to every student of English literature who has a taste for it as he grows older. The sketches of the two divisions of nineteenth-century literature given in the preceding chapter, and in that which follows, will hardly bear further reduction, and need no repetition. Let it only be remembered that, throughout the whole century, the novel, and in the wide sense the newspaper, are the departments increasing and to increase in number, while, from 1815 to 1870 at least, the novel increases also in diversity of excellence. Poetry has an even more brilliant record, for the actual production of poets and schools of poetry of the first magnitude never ceases for a hundred years and more from 1798—Tennyson overlapping Wordsworth and Swinburne Tennyson from the end of the eighteenth to the beginning of the twentieth—while in three sub-periods of about twenty years each, from 1798 to 1822, from 1830 to 1850, and from 1865 or thereabouts to 1885, there were such constellations of poetic light as have rarely been seen. All the prose branches of *belles lettres*, history, criticism, and the like, continued likewise to flourish, and from 1830 onwards theology, though scarcely philosophy, became once more an important branch of literature. That the rubbish has increased with the riches may be granted and could not be helped. But it will be well for the student always to remember the wise words of one of the best of librarians, the late Dr. Richard Garnett of the British Museum: "It is difficult to know for certain what is rubbish to-day; and it is quite impossible to know what will be rubbish to-morrow."

The nineteenth-century Library.



# CHAPTER VIII

## VICTORIAN LITERATURE

Poetry about 1830—Transition poets—Tennyson up to 1842—Browning—Later work of both—Their joint and separate characteristics in relation to their own time and others—Younger poets: Matthew Arnold—The "Spasmodics"—The "Pre-Raphaelite" poets—Character and peculiarities, important instances, and long-continued influence of their work—Progress of the novel. miscellaneous novelists, 1827–40—Dickens: his comparative isolation—Thackeray · his influence on the novel generally—Other novelists of 1845–70—Trollope, "George Eliot," the Brontës, Reade, Kingsley—Their successors—George Meredith—R. L. Stevenson—Importance of *style* in both of these, and in the latest nineteenth century generally—Its working in departments outside fiction—The first stage: De Quincey and Landor—Macaulay—Carlyle—Ruskin—Newman, Arnold, and others—Swinburne (in prose), Morris, and Pater.

Poetry about 1830.

IN 1830 and in 1832 Alfred Tennyson (1809–1892), son of a Lincolnshire clergyman, published two small volumes of *Poems*; and in the second year named Robert Browning (1812–1889), son of a clerk in the Bank of England, published a short piece of blank verse called *Pauline*. Tennyson died sixty-two years after the publication of his first book, and Browning fifty-seven years after that of his. Very many poets and some very great ones were born during this long period, but none who could challenge the supremacy of these two. Nor has any such appeared since, though it is now more than a century since the birth of the younger of the

pair, and more than twenty years since the death of both.

The youngest poet whom we mentioned with any detail in the last chapter was Keats, who was born fourteen years before Tennyson. In the interval others had come into the world who were to do good work later. Of these were Thomas Hood (1799–1845), author of much humorous verse and prose and of some serious poetry ("The Haunted House," the popular "Bridge of Sighs," and some beautiful short lyrics) which nearly approaches the great; Winthrop Mackworth Praed (1802–1839), one of those who have come nearest to Prior in "verse of society," and a master also of the grim-grotesque style in "The Red Fisherman"; Thomas Lovell Beddoes (1803–1849) and George Darley (1795–1846), exquisite if fantastic lyrists; the historian Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800–1859), whose *Lays of Ancient Rome* (1842) had great and long-continued popularity, and who wrote some better things still ("The Jacobite's Epitaph" and "The Last Buccaneer") in verse; and Sir Henry Taylor (1800–1886), author of fine literary dramas (*Philip van Artevelde*, 1834).[1] But none of these came anywhere near the importance and influence of their juniors, Tennyson and Browning themselves, who, moreover—a point also of supreme importance to literary history—were the first who can be said thoroughly to have absorbed the teaching and influences of the first Romantic school, to have entered into the inheritance, not merely of Coleridge and Wordsworth, but of Shelley and Keats.

**Transition poets.**

Even before his own first volume, Tennyson had con-

**Tennyson up to 1842.**

[1] To these should be added, but separately, one of the most remarkable writers of all but purely comic verse in English or any literature, Richard Harris Barham (1788–1845), author of *The Ingoldsby Legends* (1840–1847).

tributed not a few pieces to an earlier one called *Poems by Two Brothers* (1826) (it should have been "three," as it included work by both his elders, Charles and Frederick). But, as with Shelley and some others, we find in these no traces whatever of the powers and peculiarities which he was so soon to show. The 1830 and 1832 volumes, on the contrary, exhibited a most marked poetic personality, and though they did not attract much general attention, were violently and scornfully attacked by some critics. It is a curious instance of the want of understanding which often prevails between younger and older generations in the same movement, that Coleridge, of whose own metrical lessons Tennyson was almost the completest exponent, doubted his metre; and that Wordsworth was not quite sure of his interpretation of the country. These were private expressions of opinion; but reviewers were much more unfavourable. It is only fair to say that, except in point of metre, where he was always faultless, Tennyson in his early work gave some handles to criticism, and that he practically acknowledged the fact by such extensive alterations, made in these very poems, that readers of them in their latest forms might hardly recognise them, in some cases, without the titles. His model was now Keats more than any one else; and Keats had recognised in himself affectations and "mawkishnesses" which Tennyson even exaggerated. But when these easily removable faults were justly allowed for, there remained an individuality and a promise which no one should have missed. His very first poem in his very first volume, "Claribel," which he wisely kept, practically unaltered, in its place throughout his life, is a very short lyric, containing no story and no character-drawing. It has some slightly affected and unusual phrase, and some dialect words. But it carries the two appeals which were said above to

be those of nineteenth-century poetry—to the mind's eye and to the mind's ear—with a vague but inspiriting touch of one of the universal poetic motives, the sense of Death contrasted with Life—to a pitch which you will hardly find even in Coleridge, Shelley, or Keats for elaboration and completeness of artistic effect.[1] And yet "Claribel" is a mere trifle, comparatively speaking.

Its qualities are shown, to more advantage for the ordinary reader, even in the 1830 volume, by the "Ode to Memory," the "Recollections of the Arabian Nights," "The Dying Swan," "A Dirge," and others; while that of 1832 contained the far finer and more elaborate "Lady of Shalott," "Œnone," "The Palace of Art," "A Dream of Fair Women," and "The Lotos Eaters." Yet all these had faults in them, and Tennyson let no less than ten years pass before he published another pair of volumes, correcting the old work and adding new pieces, some of these last of still higher quality, such as "Morte d'Arthur," "Ulysses" (one of the very greatest pieces of blank verse in the language), "Locksley Hall," and "The Vision of Sin," the last of which is a wonderful concerted piece of various metres in form, and one of Tennyson's most successful in treatment of subject. This collection was issued in the year 1842. It made known, to those who chose to know it, the presence of a new poet, of absolutely the first class, in English literature.

Browning

The progress and reception of Browning's work were different, but not so very different at first. The short poem mentioned above, *Pauline* (rather in Shelley's

[1] The student should compare with it three examples not far removed in general kind, Coleridge's "Grave of Sir Arthur O'Kellyn," Keats's above-mentioned "December" piece, and Shelley's "O World, O Life, O Time." They are, in ascending measure, much greater *poems*; but they are nothing like such elaborate works of art.

manner, and with a good deal about Shelley himself in it) passed almost unnoticed. It showed already that quality which was long almost universally and is even yet commonly called "obscurity," but in which some of perhaps the best judges have seen and see little more than a very rapid, and as it were shorthand, thought and expression of thought. This appeared still more in his next and longer work, *Paracelsus* (1835), a sort of drama, and most of all in *Sordello* (1839), which, during many years, remained a by-word for unintelligibility. A little before it he had written the more regular play of *Strafford* (1837). All these, being long pieces of connected subject, showed him at some disadvantage owing to the peculiarity above noticed, though he had discovered a charming lyric faculty in one or two inserted songs. Fortunately, he now turned to shorter poems, and, beginning the year before Tennyson's great revelation (1841) but finishing four years after it (1846), issued in parts a collection whimsically called, from the ornaments on the Jewish High Priest's vestments, *Bells and Pomegranates*. This contained plays, short pieces half narrative, half soliloquy (a kind which he made specially his own), but also many great lyrics. Few did, but anybody might, now recognise another poet of almost if not quite the first rank, and of the special nineteenth-century species. Obscurity and eccentricity have been at times positively and unduly popular. But the early middle of the nineteenth century was not one of these times, and Browning had still many years to wait for general acceptance.

Later work of both.

Tennyson, whom only very obstinate or very dull people could profess not to understand, and who in some parts of his work, "The May Queen," "Dora," etc., appealed, if not exactly to the vulgar, at any rate to much more commonplace tastes than those which

enjoyed the poems enumerated above, made way, not with extreme rapidity, but surely and ever more swiftly, after 1842. In 1847 he published *The Princess* (a serio-comic epic of great beauty in the serious parts, enriched in its second edition with lyrics more beautiful still), and in 1850 *In Memoriam*, a series of elegies on his friend Arthur Hallam's death, which, though sometimes over-praised and very often mispraised, none but a poet of the first rank could have written. In this year too he was made Poet Laureate, and wrote, in 1852, his *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*. A mere list of his full work with the shortest abstract of contents would be too much for us here. We must be content to say that *Maud* (1855), *The Idylls of the King* (1859), and many volumes of miscellaneous poems—generally entitled from the first piece, but in one case, and the finest, called *Ballads* (1880)—sustained and varied, if they did not raise, his fame. At one time (1875 and later) he tried, partly under the encouragement of a great actor, Sir Henry Irving, the acting drama (*Harold, Queen Mary, Becket,* etc.), but though there was, as a matter of course, fine poetry in his plays, he was not the magician who could get rid of the divorce so long existing between the theatre and literature.

For many years the "British public" still, as he said, would not "like" Browning; but he paid no attention to its likes or dislikes, issuing, in no hurry but at his own pleasure, *Christmas Eve and Easter Day* in 1850, *Men and Women* in 1855. But it was not till 1864 that a new collection, *Dramatis Personae*, following upon one of his entire work up to the time (except *Pauline*), put him, with the generality, in his true place beside Tennyson. Perhaps indeed it was not till *The Ring and the Book* (1868–1869), a huge poem in four volumes, found a new

public to appreciate it. He now had not only admirers but fanatical and even rather foolish partisans or idolaters; and the effect of this was not wholly good, for it encouraged him, during the rest of his life, to hurry out volumes chiefly composed of rather loose blank verse. But he never lost the power of exquisite lyric-writing, while even his other verse could be fine, and his last volume, *Asolando*, published just as he died, was thoroughly worthy of him.

Their joint and separate characteristics in relation to their own time and others.

Although the details just given may seem insufficient for two such great and recently interesting poets, they are fuller than in previous cases of equal or greater rank. And the reason of this is that nowhere else, in a great poetic period, are there two poets who, in a manner so singularly complete, express the general poetic character of that time and of poetry generally. Chaucer, Gower, and Langland do it for their own day almost as completely as was possible, but then that day was a limited one. Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton do it, after a fashion, for the great Elizabethan or English Renaissance time; but Shakespeare is rather too much, as the famous saying goes, "for all time" to represent his own specially, and the other two leave much out. Master Tennyson and Browning—it is a task which will take the student some time after he has outgrown this book—and you have the origins of practically all subsequent poetry from the date when they began. The readers of these pages, when they are a little older, will have passed the time which, like other times, talks foolishly of the literature (in this case "Victorian" literature) immediately preceding it; and they will be able to see how directly the great Pre-Raphaelite school, to which we shall come presently, and the not yet classed poets who followed and are writing at the present moment, derive from Tennyson and Browning, as well as how completely

Tennyson and Browning sum up the poetical achievement (purely individual touches being left out) of the earlier nineteenth century. And as soon as any such reader feels—as it may be hoped many will feel—a distinct appreciation of poetry, let him read any piece of contemporary verse, then a piece of Swinburne's or Rossetti's, then one of Tennyson's or Browning's, then one of Shelley's or Keats's, and having done this turn to anything, however good, in the poets from Dryden to Crabbe, except Blake. He will, if he is ever going to understand literature at all, see that the first group of specimens are of one family, the last of another.

Younger poets: Matthew Arnold.

It is not, however, to be supposed that Tennyson's influence—still less that Browning's—was accepted with the docility which had for the most part been shown to Dryden, to Pope, and to Johnson. Such docility would have been quite contrary to the independent, experimental, and questing spirit of Romanticism. For a time they had no contemporaries of importance, except those mentioned at the beginning of this chapter as intermediate or transition writers, and the lady whom Browning himself married;[1] while Browning, though he taught much to poetic enthusiasts, was, till he became an old man, too little popular to arouse any rivalry. But it was otherwise with Tennyson. Not long after he had taken his definite and life-long—if not age-long—position by the 1842 volumes, there came into the field a man not much more than ten years younger than

[1] Elizabeth Barrett (1806–1861), who was five years older than her husband, published poems before him, and became popular, in a way, long before he did. She has been described as "a great poetess and almost a great poet," and she possessed much lyrical gift, alloyed with a false sort of sentiment, now Byronic, now mawkish and "gushing," as well as a terrible deficiency in taste for language and rhyme. She had, in fact, something in common with the "Spasmodics" (see below).

himself, Matthew Arnold (1822–1888), a son of the historian already mentioned. Arnold was even more remarkable as a prose-writer (that part of his work must be postponed for a little), and this prose work was definitely, deliberately, indeed almost exclusively devoted to criticism. He had been more regularly educated than Tennyson, who, though he went to Cambridge, never took a degree there, and had only been at a country grammar-school, while Matthew Arnold was a Winchester and Rugby boy, a scholar of Balliol, and a Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford. He had, moreover, imbued himself with German ideas, especially from Goethe, and French criticism, especially from Sainte-Beuve, and he did not think Tennyson classical or critical enough. The ancients, and especially the Greek critics (the elder of whom knew no language but their own, and were therefore unable to appreciate the effect of translation), had held that the subject was the great if not the only thing in poetry. Goethe had eagerly taken this up, and seemed at least to maintain that *only* what you can translate in poetry matters—a doctrine from which his own sometimes exquisite lyrics would suffer pretty heavily. Taking these and other ideas up, Arnold endeavoured to "re-classicise" English poetry. But he did not in the least succeed in practice. His own poems, with some curious slips of taste and ear, are often very beautiful, but though they are sometimes less free and florid in language than those of Tennyson and Browning, there is little real difference between them, and Arnold sometimes unconsciously echoes Tennyson himself. But though his doing this is of great historical interest, it was not necessary for him to do anything of the kind; for he came very little short of being a poet of the first class in a thoroughly nineteenth-century style. His classical play, *Merope*, is a dull sort of thing,

and his unrhymed verses are as unsuccessful as that kind has usually been. But in "Sohrab and Rustum," with its fine blank verse not too Miltonic; in "Tristram and Iseult," in various metres, especially a loose but lovely decasyllabic couplet which was later taken up by William Morris; and in a large number of minor poems of essentially nineteenth-century character, the beauty of the treatment, if it does not entirely obscure the subject, frequently makes the reader forget all about it. Of these are "The Forsaken Merman," "The Scholar Gipsy" and its sequel "Thyrsis," the two latter celebrations of Oxford, and expressions of the vague melancholy and dissatisfaction, itself nothing if not Romantic, of the time.

A little later, about the middle of the century and slightly before *Maud* (in which, after a fashion of his, Tennyson showed that he could take his rivals on their own ground and beat them), came what is called the "Spasmodic" school, a sort of exaggeration of this Romantic disquiet, recalling to some extent the excess of the early German Romantic writers. The chief members of this, P. J. Bailey (1816–1892) (*Festus*), Sidney Dobell (1824–1874) (*Balder*), Alexander Smith (1830–1867) (*A Life Drama*), would have been great poets if they could, and sometimes were by no means bad ones. But they were extravagant, uncritical, sometimes merely silly; and the best thing they produced was the charming parody-drama of *Firmilian* by William Edmonstoune Aytoun (1813–1865), who did much other good work in verse and prose. Although the school itself lasted not long, and had no formal constitution, *Festus* at least had very wide vogue and not a little influence. The same tendencies revive from time to time, and *Firmilian* is not in the least obsolete; so that those who pooh-pooh the admission of the Spasmodics to history are scarcely wise.

**The "Spasmodics."**

The "Pre-Raphaelite" poets

These attempts—at classical reaction and at exaggerated Romanticism—were failures, though in counteracting each other they were useful. A new, real, and valuable development came a little later still in the shape of what is called—not quite happily, but, for want of a better name, tolerably—the "Pre-Raphaelite" school. The close connection between poetry and painting in the new literature has already been pointed out; and it happened that about the "forties" of the century certain young painters, following to some extent the critical ideas of Mr. Ruskin (see below), devoted themselves to the counterpart in art of the mediaeval influence which had had so great an effect in letters. One of these, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), was equally great as poet and as painter; and he and his still younger friends, William Morris (1834–1896) and Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909), were the first and greatest members of the school in poetry. But they were not in the least hostile to Tennyson or to Browning; on the contrary, they were ardent admirers of both, and they represented, not a breach with but a further development of, the poetic ideals and methods which, beginning with Coleridge, had been continued by Shelley and Keats, and carried to perfection by the two then living leaders. To perfection in one sense but not in another. All true art is infinitely wide as well as long; and if any form cannot be varied and can only be imitated, like the verse of Pope, it is an infallible sign that it is not of the highest kind. These young poets (as they were about 1859) had, if no *positive* advantage of genius over Tennyson and Browning, a *relative* one of knowledge. Much more was known about the great ages of the past, Middle, Renaissance, and earlier modern, than had been known earlier; comparative study of literature and history and painting and sculpture and music had

become more common. Into this new heritage they entered.

The precise influences which worked on the three were rather different in each case. All, as no Pre-Raphaelite could help being, were strongly mediaeval; but they took their mediaevalism from rather different sources. Rossetti, who was of three-parts Italian blood, went straight to the beautiful work of his ancestors, the forerunners and contemporaries of Dante. Swinburne, who was very widely read in many languages, mingled pure classical, especially Greek, influences with French older and newer, and English of almost every period, but especially the Elizabethan. Morris was almost purely English or Scandinavian, and the English period he most affected was that of Chaucer, the Chaucerians, and Malory. Partly from the effect of these studies, and partly no doubt from that of natural disposition, Rossetti was specially and in perfection master of the sonnet, though also of other kinds of lyric and of the ballad romance; Swinburne of almost every kind of poetry, but especially of lyric; and Morris (though also possessing a charming lyrical faculty) of narrative romance, in which he recovered the fluency and power of adaptation of the old Middle English writers, with much more than their poetical gift and with an almost Chaucerian ease. Rossetti's sister, Christina (1830–1894), was hardly if at all the inferior of her brother, and in the judgment of some disputes with Mrs. Browning, while in that of others she seems easily to carry off, the title of the greatest of English poetesses. Richard Watson Dixon (1833–1900), like Morris, belonged to the school from Oxford days, and though his poetry never during his lifetime attracted the attention which it deserved, was at his best a poet of the truest and of a very rare kind. And soon after the

publication[1] of the first works of the school they were widely and eagerly imitated. Much of this imitation, as mere imitation always is, was worthless, or at best a creditable exercise. But in at least two writers, Arthur O'Shaughnessy (1844–1881) and a second James Thomson (1854–1882), it was produced by writers of sufficient genius and individuality to deserve mention here.

Character and peculiarities.

This school, the last great one in English, and one the influence of which is hardly yet exhausted, though it may have been recently blended with minor ingredients, represents, as has been said, no revolt from the previous stage, any more than that stage represented revolt from its own predecessor; but simply a further development of those great principles of varied appeal to the senses of the mind, of the tendency to extend and vary subject, and of that towards lyrical and "occasional" verse. There is no doubt that the whole school was to some extent influenced by the double profession of its practical founder, Rossetti, in pushing, farther than even Keats and Tennyson had done, the attempt to render form and colour in poetry. Pitt (see above) would have been still more astonished than he was when reading *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* if he had chanced upon these poets. They imported also, more largely than Tennyson or even Browning had done, archaic or foreign locutions; while, in Swinburne more particularly, the phraseology of the Authorised Version (always affected by great writers in prose and verse) was utilised with increased effect. But what was again most remarkable in all of them was

[1] That publication was, in Dante Rossetti's case, deferred by domestic circumstances for some years, but he was the eldest and the most originally influential. Morris and Swinburne had made their first appearances with little notice, but the former's *Life and Death of Jason* (1866–1867) and Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) at once arrested public attention.

the almost illimitable spirit of experiment which animated their exercises in metre. They never transgressed the sound traditional laws of English prosody, which are all to be found in Shakespeare and Milton, and which have been outlined throughout this little book. But they employed the central principle of liberty to its fullest extent, Christina Rossetti especially playing the very boldest (though still quite legitimate) tricks with the instrument. Swinburne, in the dedication of his most famous book, *Poems and Ballads* (1866), to the great painter Burne-Jones, described the poetical region among many other characteristics as

> A land of clear colours and stories
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And a murmur of musical flowers.

It would be necessary to quote all the other particulars in the context in order to give a full idea of the work of these seven poets; but the two selected lines sum up not ill the beauty, the pastime, the perfume, and the music which their work attempts to give and does give to those who are able to receive them.

It follows from what has been said that it is almost impossible even to make a catalogue of their multifarious work. Rossetti's is the smallest in bulk, but both it and his sister's contain what are called "sonnet sequences"—series of sonnets on the same or kindred subjects which almost constitute long poems; and the longest and finest of his ballad-romances, *Rose Mary*, runs to more than a thousand lines. Morris, after a volume of delightful and extremely novel short poems, the *Defence of Guinevere* (1858), took to the long ones above named, *The Life and Death of Jason*, *The Earthly Paradise* (a huge series of narratives, partly from mediaeval, partly from classical sources, introduced and

Important instances.

connected by a sort of frame like that of Chaucer or Gower), *Sigurd the Volsung*. Swinburne tried everything, plays, not for acting (*Atalanta in Calydon*, *Chastelard*, *Bothwell*, *Erechtheus*), and long poems (*Tristram of Lyonesse*), but chiefly produced volumes of the general type so common in the century, sometimes entitled from their first piece, but really collections of disconnected and more or less lyrical work—three series of *Poems and Ballads*, *Songs before Sunrise*, etc. Christina Rossetti in the same way named her earlier volumes from pieces of some length, *Goblin Market* (1861) and *The Prince's Progress*, but wrote mainly lyrics. Canon Dixon produced one long poem, *Mano*, in the (for English) rather unusual *terza rima* of Dante, but most of his work was also lyrical, as was that of O'Shaughnessy, who indeed wrote nothing of any length except some adaptations of the Old French poetess, Marie de France. Thomson, strongly imbued with pessimist ideas, embodied them in one poem of considerable length, *The City of Dreadful Night*, but most of his work is also of the "short poem" kind.

and long-continued influence of their work.

This point is of importance for the study of the historical progress of English poetry. In long poems the importance of action, plot, and so forth, on which critics like Matthew Arnold laid special stress, is very great. But it is practically impossible for any one to keep, throughout a long poem, the height of passionate expression, the elaborate and gorgeous word-painting, and the varied appeals of music which Romantic poetry demands. Even Milton could not do this, and though Spenser went far towards it, he did not quite succeed, and, in the opinion of some, sacrificed general to detailed effect. In short poems, however, if the poet has the genius and will take the pains, he may hope to attain the object of entrancing and absorbing the reader by such

a combination throughout. And it is at this stimulation or enchantment that these poets, like all poets of the nineteenth century except Wordsworth and (in theory) Arnold himself, specially aimed. Even William Morris (who was first of all a romancer of a somewhat archaic character, to whom verse and prose came almost indifferently) was yet, in *The Defence of Guinevere* and in some later books, quite on the level of his fellows in the lyrical way. Dramatic work is not more decidedly the special kind of the Elizabethan period, nor satiric and didactic that of the Augustan, than lyric is of the Victorian. Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats had shown this in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. But it was the Victorian poets who were to demonstrate it even more fully. And though certain tricks in language of the three leaders have been abandoned, though in some cases rougher metres and unrhymed or irregular arrangements have been attempted, and though other efforts at innovation have been made, it will not be found that any serious revolution had been achieved even up to Mr. Swinburne's very recent death.

Progress of the novel: miscellaneous novelists, 1827–40

Somewhat later than the appearance of the new poets mentioned at the beginning of this chapter there appeared also a new start in the novel. Novels had continued to be written in crowds; but only two of the greatest writers had contributed to them, and one of these, Miss Austen, had found few followers as yet. Scott, too, lived till after the appearance of Tennyson. The immense popularity and profit of his achievement had indeed excited plenty of attempts to imitate him, but the most successful things, those of G. P. R. James (1801–1860) and Harrison Ainsworth (1805–1882), were scarcely of the first class in this way. Many writers, great or almost great in other ways, Hogg, Hunt, De Quincey, Wilson, Lockhart, even Moore, wrote novels

of this or that kind: and between 1817 and 1830 Thomas Love Peacock (1785–1866) (who took up the series thirty years later still in his last novel, *Gryll Grange*, 1860) wrote in *Headlong Hall* and others to *Crotchet Castle*, a kind of "eccentric" novel (see above on Sterne, p. 164), the purely literary character of which was very high indeed. The great War with France had caused the growth of specialist novels in naval and military affairs, of which Frederick Marryat (1792–1848) and Charles Lever (1806–1872) were the chief practitioners, and Marryat at least an unsurpassed one in his own kind. Moreover the remarkable and frequently varying talent of Edward George Bulwer, afterwards Lord Lytton (1803–1873), appeared as early as 1827 with *Falkland*, the first of a series, changing remarkably in kind, and at one time so popular as to earn for him the position, in some estimations, of "greatest living novelist." But nobody had approached Scott in his own line of historical and adventurous fiction; and few people had even attempted to develop that immense field of perfectly ordinary life and manners which, as we saw, Miss Austen had opened. In particular nobody had yet been able to shake off (Marryat perhaps came nearest to doing so) the sort of artificial dialect which, borrowed to a great extent from the stage, hung upon the novel.

Very close (according to the old rule) to the birth-years of Tennyson and Browning occurred those of two future novelists, one of whom was to produce work of a class in a way eccentric, but at its best first-rate, while the other was to give, both to the historical and to the domestic novel, an almost entirely new inspiration. And these were followed, also as usual, by others only second to themselves.

Charles Dickens (1812–1870) suffered some hardships

Dickens: his comparative isolation.

in his youth and was very irregularly educated, but took early (at the age of seventeen) to newspaper work, and when just of age began to write the *Sketches by Boz*, soon afterwards collected—things half essay and half story, owing not a little to Leigh Hunt and to Theodore Hook.[1] A chance commission gave him the opportunity of writing the wonderful and quite unique *Pickwick Papers* (1837), the freshest and most unalloyed expression of his peculiar genius. It made, and deserved to make, his fortune. He followed it up next year with his first regular novel, *Oliver Twist*, and continued writing for more than thirty years till he died suddenly in 1870, leaving an unfinished piece, *Edwin Drood*. These novels have probably on the whole been more widely read than any others in English with the single exception of Scott's, which had twenty years' start. Dickens himself came near to the historical novel in *Barnaby Rudge*, and deliberately attempted it in *A Tale of Two Cities*. But his usual form, apart from *The Pickwick Papers* which stands alone, is a sort of cross between the novel of ordinary life and the fantastic tale, the humours and eccentricities of individuals being enlarged sometimes, especially in his later books, to the point of exaggeration and even of caricature. *David Copperfield* (1849–1850), perhaps commonly thought his masterpiece, has much that is autobiographical in it, and less than any other of pure extravaganza, though it has something of the melodramatic. His work has never been successfully imitated, and can be very severely criticised in parts; but while it has attraction for readers of almost all classes, some of those who find most fault with it critically read it oftenest.

[1] A writer (1788–1841) of brilliant though in great part wasted talent, who was an active and popular novelist and journalist between 1820 and 1840.

Thackeray: his influence on the novel generally.

William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863) was the son of an official high in the East Indian service, inherited a small fortune, though he managed to spend it or lose it soon, and was educated at Charterhouse and Cambridge. He began, even as an undergraduate, to write for publication, and never gave up the practice, to which indeed, before long, he was indebted for his livelihood. But he was persistently unlucky, and it was years, and even many years, before he got his wonderful powers really to work. During these years he tried everything, light verse of unique character, reviews, burlesque and other tales, political articles especially on foreign affairs, travels at home and abroad, in fact, anything that the numerous papers for which he wrote could demand or would accept. In nearly all this work there appeared a singular and as yet almost unexampled kind of "humour" resulting from the union of deep feeling with the wildest surface of sometimes apparently cynical and extravagant jesting, and with intimate thought on human affairs. At last one large and one small thing, the great satirical novel of *Vanity Fair* (1846–1848) and the slight but charming sketch of the manners of society in *Mrs. Perkins's Ball*, opened his proper place to him, when two-thirds of his life, which was to be a short one, were gone. In his last stage he produced three more novels, *Pendennis*, *Esmond*, and *The Newcomes*, of the greatest kind, a fifth, *The Virginians*, of more disputed merit, and a sixth, *The Adventures of Philip*, which, though containing some of his best things, is perhaps inferior as a whole; more of his charming verse, "merry and sad to tell," and some miscellaneous things, especially a series of essays, *Roundabout Papers* (1860–1863), in which his literary character and powers are almost completely miniatured.

In Thackeray's case, as in others here, it is important to consider, not merely this nature and its result in work, but the relation of it as work to past and future literature. Thackeray's peculiar blend of humour and pathos, of the sharpest satire with the profoundest melancholy, does not appeal to—in fact is not comprehended by—everybody. To appreciate it thoroughly you must "love art for art's sake and nature for nature's sake." Except in some rather external points he is not more imitable than Dickens, though he is much less popular. But when we leave his intentional burlesques—and even to some extent in them—we find something which is not in Dickens and which can be followed. This is the selection of subjects, and the treatment of them, in exact adjustment to the chances and ways of ordinary modern life—in other words, Miss Austen's plan revived and re-created in a manlier and larger fashion. In his, as in her case, this sacrifice of appeal to extraordinary *incident* was accompanied by an extraordinary command of human *character*, and of life in its most superficially trivial as well as in its fundamentally deepest points. This might in either case be hard enough to follow. But the general system could be followed, and was.

Unlike Miss Austen, too, who, deliberately and no doubt wisely, refused to try the historical novel, Thackeray tried it in *Esmond*, which some have thought his very greatest book, and again left not merely work consummate in itself but great *pattern*-work. In it he improves upon Scott by giving a more exact picture of the ways, manners, and even language of the time, deeper drawn if not more life-like characters, and that peculiar blended attitude or temper of his which has been noted above — that of the outwardly impartial but inwardly sympathetic onlooker who, in deed and truth, sees most of the game. He thus follows Fieldi

and Scott himself as a regenerator of the novel, and novelists still pursue the ways he opened.

Other novelists of 1845–70.

And, yet once more, the advent of these two capital novelists was actually succeeded by that of numerous lesser but not so very much lesser ones, as well as by that of a crowd, which need not be noticed, of followers lesser still. Charles Reade (1814–1884), Anthony Trollope (1815–1882), Charlotte Brontë (1816–1855) and her younger sister Emily, Mary Ann Evans ("George Eliot") (1819–1880), and Charles Kingsley (1819–1875) were all born before 1820 and close to one another, and therefore came in time to experience, and to some extent to assimilate, the influence of the two still greater writers. Reade has something of Dickens in him; all the others more or less of Thackeray. But all had enough of individual talent, and sufficient imbuement with the general tendency of the time, to have produced, in all probability, remarkable work if England had been so unfortunate as to have no Thackeray and no Dickens. They all exemplified what we may call the new *expatiation* of the novel—the handling of it with extended subjects, modernised phrase, occasional indulgence in the new (see below) ornate prose, mixture of novel and romance in plot, and redoubled attention to individual not typical character, more or less carefully analysed, as well as additional study of what is called "local colour," that is to say, attention to the manners, language, fashions, etc., of the time dealt with.

Trollope, "George Eliot," the Brontes, Reade, Kingsley.

Reade, beginning very late (1852), and wasting much of his time upon second-rate play-writing, showed, when he came to write novels, especially in *It is Never Too Late to Mend* (1856) and *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1862), a strange compound of original genius, acquired scholarship and reading, and a most laborious collection of details from newspapers and

books to work and colour up his own inventions. Trollope, who was in the Civil Service, and also did not publish very early, was one of the most prolific novelists of the century and one of the most characteristic. With one or two early and later excursions into different kinds, which were not great successes, his novels from *The Warden* (1855) and *Barchester Towers* to his death, over forty in number, were occupied with vivid representation of the actual society of his time—reproduced with less genius than Thackeray's, and more superficial and ephemeral, but almost as life-like. The other three were more ambitious. Charlotte (*Jane Eyre*, 1847) and Emily Brontë (the third sister, Anne, wrote also, but was less noteworthy) threw a good deal more of the older and more emotional romance into their work, though not going out of their way for any very extraordinary incident. They were nothing if not passionate; but combined with their passion minute details of manners. "George Eliot," again a very late-writing novelist (*Scenes of Clerical Life*, 1857, and *Adam Bede* next year), while quite unlike the Brontës in most ways, also made passion, though of a less florid kind, a strong element in her novels, but (especially in her later work) combined this with the apparently opposite element of a peculiar, half-scientific, half-philosophical technicality. In one book, *Romola* (1863), she essayed the new historical novel of the type of *Esmond*. Charles Kingsley,[1] beginning with small and immature but singularly picturesque and romantic studies (*Yeast*, *Alton Locke*) of the disturbed political and social time of 1848–1849, passed to the great historical novels of *Hypatia* (1853) (dealing with

[1] Not to be confused with his younger brother Henry (1830–1876), also a novelist of talent approaching genius, but less varied and less poetical. Charles was actually a poet, writing little, but sometimes exquisitely.

the last days of the Roman Empire and of pagan philosophy) and *Westward Ho!* (1854) (with the wars of England and Spain in the sixteenth century). Opinions as to his later books, *Two Years Ago* (1857) and *Hereward the Wake* (1866) have varied. But his adventure in what has been here called the "eccentric" novel, or at least story-book,[1] *The Water Babies* (1863), a delightful tangle of science, poetry, satire, description of nature, and things in general, showed his extraordinary versatility.

Their successors.

And this process of what we may call world-exploration in fiction of old times and new, of novel- and romance-subjects, of society and the life of thought, of everything human in short, continued (with new recruits of only slightly less power) for a very long time. It was developed, in one direction chiefly, by a novelist about ten years younger than George Eliot and Kingsley, George Meredith (1829–1911), and in another by one twenty years younger still, Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894), who, though the most fervent of Meredith's admirers, himself wrote in quite a different style.

George Meredith.

Both of these were also writers in verse (Meredith was distinctly a poet, though of a rather eccentric kind), and both of them devoted themselves entirely to literature. Meredith's first considerable work, which was also perhaps his best, was a novel entitled *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859). Although this first book attracted notice at once from those who were capable of appreciating it, it was not popular, and he had to write against public taste for nearly as long as Browning, whom he in some way resembles, while in others there is an

[1] These things were tried, about the same period and later, not unfrequently, but naturally with various success. The most famous of all—a book never likely to be forgotten, and a rare masterpiece of fantastic humour—was *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), by Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832–1908), who called himself "Lewis Carroll."

equally strong resemblance to Dickens. His subjects are usually quite ordinary, and he contrives, like Dickens, to make them extraordinary. But his means of doing this are as different as possible from Dickens's. They consist chiefly (and here the resemblance to Browning comes in, though Meredith carries them much further) in an excessively contorted and unusual style, intensely literary, requiring not a little mental gymnastic on the part of the reader to get the better of it, and unfortunately sometimes tempting those who do not understand it to make as if they did. But Meredith was a man of undoubted genius, a master of character, and (when he would let it be seen) of story. His popularity, when it came, turned, as in Browning's case, to an almost furious partisanship, and he has exercised great influence. But critical opinion about him has not yet got settled from extremes.

Stevenson's way of fiction was the romance rather than the novel; and when, after many trials, he had made a successful appeal to the public in *Treasure Island* (1883), he stuck to it. Like Meredith's, his principal concern—both in novel-writing and in the somewhat Hazlitt-like essays which some of his admirers preferred even to his novels—was style. But he set himself to attain this in a different way. Meredith had shaped himself in literature without deliberately imitating anybody, or rather by deliberately writing as nobody else had done. Stevenson acquired his style by laborious imitations of other styles, Meredith's included. It is a disputed question whether he ever attained one that was distinctly and certainly his own; but his quest of it, in connection with the character of his novels, made him very interesting. The greatest romance-writers and historical novelists of the earlier nineteenth century—Scott in English, and Dumas in French—had been

R. L. Stevenson.

Importance of *style* in both these

rather careless, merely as writers; and Thackeray, though possessing a marvellous and unique style of his own, had written quite simply, and had even allowed himself occasionally to make slips in minute details of composition. George Eliot had charged her style latterly with technical terminology, and Kingsley, especially in his early work, had taken up the methods of Mr. Ruskin (see below) in description. But no novelist (unless we go back to Sterne) till Meredith, and after him hardly anybody in modern times till Stevenson, had obviously made his manner of writing an object, almost apart from the tale he had to tell.

and in the latest nineteenth century generally.

This carefulness and troubling about style in prose is the most remarkable development, on that side of literature, during the nineteenth century, and it is, as might be expected, specially noticeable in the department to which we are coming—that of essay-writing, both critical and other. It should be remembered that when the great change to "Augustanism" took place about 1660, there was—in poetry and prose alike—a general tendency to turn away from elaborate and gorgeous writing, from attention to complicated metre in the one case, and to varied and elaborate rhythm in the other. When this general tendency was reversed, its effects might be expected to be felt in both "harmonics" (as Dryden called prose and verse) of language. But it must also be remembered that, during the Elizabethan period itself, elaborate prose had been (except in the premature and mainly false experiment of Lyly) later than elaborate verse, and the fact repeated itself now. Coleridge indeed, the eternal pioneer, had (see above, p. 176) been first here also, and had written elaborate, highly coloured, definitely rhythmical prose almost before the beginning of the century. But the time was in fact so well provided by the action of the work of Johnson,

Burke, and Gibbon on the earlier Augustan plain style, that there was no urgent necessity for it to look for new things. Still, the appetite for colour and sound was sure to make itself felt in prose before very long, and at least by the third if not the second decade of the century it did so, and continued to do so in successive waves or stages, particularly in the departments of criticism, essay-writing, and history. The first stage may be represented by three men, all noticed before, and all born some way within the eighteenth century—De Quincey, Wilson, and Landor. Then we may take two great practitioners in all the kinds just mentioned, strongly contrasted with each other—Macaulay and Carlyle; next the epoch-making influence of Mr. Ruskin, with the quieter if not directly opposed Oxford school represented by Cardinal Newman, Dean Mansel, Mr. Froude, and (with a difference) Matthew Arnold; and lastly the prose Pre-Raphaelite developments.

Its working in departments outside fiction.

In the first group there are remarkable differences between De Quincey and Wilson on the one hand and Landor on the other. Both of the former were essentially contributors to periodicals, and the only book of importance which either of them wrote, De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, appeared first in the *London Magazine*. Landor, whose peculiar temper would have made it nearly impossible for him either to edit or to contribute to any periodical, produced most of his voluminous prose in book-form, as *Imaginary Conversations* between historical or invented persons. Wilson was by far the weakest and most unequal of the three, though his position on *Blackwood's Magazine* gave him great influence, but De Quincey and Landor are among the greatest of English prose-writers. The former, who had no poetical gift, deliberately set about making prose a rival to poetry; Landor had no need to do this,

The first stage: De Quincey and Landor.

being himself perfectly capable of writing poetry of a high class and in no small volume. But his prose was actually more ornate than his verse. And we find in his dream-descriptions, of which he was very fond, and in such famous passages of De Quincey as the visions of "Our Lady of Sorrow," "The English Mail Coach," "Savannah la Mar," etc., pieces of prose which not merely permit but actually invite arrangement in "feet," though these feet do not repeat themselves, after the same or closely similar patterns, as in the case with verse. In imaginative or passionate subjects, to which both are much addicted, this prose can be used with great effect, and is then a delightful possession. But it is not very well suited for others; and it has, as it had had in the seventeenth century, the great danger of being liable to break down and become tawdry or ridiculous. In fact Wilson's very often does this, and De Quincey's occasionally approaches collapse. Landor's more classical style escapes better, but is sometimes ponderous when he tries to be grand, and trivial when he attempts lightness.

The next pair can hardly be said to have derived anything from, or to have been at all affected by, these of whom they were slightly younger contemporaries. But they show equally, in their own different ways, the general desire to get to something beyond the mere standard style, good as it was, which had resulted from the influence of Johnson, Burke, and Gibbon on the plainer Augustan method, and which was represented at

Macaulay. its best by Southey. When Macaulay sent his famous essay on Milton, which he himself denounced later as "gaudy and ungraceful," to the editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, Jeffrey asked him "where on earth he got his style?" No answer on his part has survived; but some have tried to give it for him—alleging Burke, Gibbon, Hazlitt, and others. The truth is that it is the

antithetic manner of Johnson and his contemporaries, emphasised and re-made with something of the peculiar individualism of the nineteenth century. The sentences become much shorter; the antitheses simpler and more obvious. Constant allusions to history and literature are brought in; proper names are freely used, but very often (here the resemblance to Gibbon comes) periphrases are substituted for them. A curious amount of detail in fact is supplied, somewhat in Defoe's way, to supply an air of verisimilitude; and the most careful pains are taken never to venture a hesitating or qualified statement. All is perfectly clear, and the reader feels, not merely that he understands everything (which gives him a pleasant sensation of equality), but that he has met a man who knows a great deal more than he does, and has settled every question that comes up (which tempers the other feeling with a generous humility). Macaulay applied and perfected this style in a long and famous series of *Essays* on historical and literary subjects before he used it in his still more famous *History of England*, which, beginning with a retrospective sketch, deals at immense but never tedious length with the reign of James II. and part of that of William III. For what is called "readableness" Macaulay has never had a superior; and it is only after some time that the style begins to seem a little noisy and monotonous, only after a good deal of independent and comparative study that the matter is found to be rather treacherously superficial and one-sided.

Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), an older man than Macaulay, but with some early disadvantages, began with even less innovation upon the standard style than Macaulay had shown. His *Life of Schiller* (1825) is, as far as manner goes, merely a very good example of this style itself. But the subject is tell-tale, for it intimated

Carlyle.

an acquaintance, which amounted to a devotion, with German literature—for some sixty or seventy years past the home of the eccentric, the extravagant, and the passionate — as well as an attempt to master the philosophy of history and literature generally. Carlyle's nature and his studies took but little time in breaking through and remaking this style. From Swift and Sterne in English; from the disciples and caricaturists of these two, Hamann, Lichtenberg, Jean Paul Richter in German; from the perfervid and eccentric genius of his own countrymen, such as Sir Thomas Urquhart; and above all from his own restless, melancholy, volcanic temperament, he fashioned an extraordinary manner, which showed itself first, and with a sort of juvenile extravagance, in *Sartor Resartus* (1831). Then, besides many *Essays* on history and literature, he wrote *The French Revolution* (1837), perhaps on the whole his masterpiece; a marvellously painstaking treatment of Cromwell's *Letters and Speeches* (1845); a sombre comment on English politics in *Chartism*; a singularly brilliant specimen of his power of conceiving and revivifying history in *Past and Present* (1843), also political, and a later work on contemporary subjects, but not obsolete by any means, called *Latter-day Pamphlets* (1850); some vivid but not well-proportioned *Lectures on Heroes*; a characteristic but singularly attractive *Life* of his friend Sterling; and lastly, the immense, almost chaotic, but wonderfully rich and varied *Frederick the Second*, which cost him fourteen years' labour. Carlyle's style horrified even a generation which had outgrown most of the purely neo-classic restrictions; and before this horror had quite died out, new points of view had succeeded his. But for more than a quarter of a century he had more influence than any other prose-writer on young men of intelligence, though they might very

seldom agree with all of his views or even with most of them; he was a chief inspirer of men of genius like Ruskin, Froude, and Kingsley; and there is little doubt that he will, for all time, keep his place as the most forcible, thoughtful, and "magnetic" representative of the combined principles of obstinate individuality, keen interest, and wide knowledge which characterise Victorian literature.

It was not till 1843—when Carlyle and Macaulay were already men of middle age, and, as cricketers say, thoroughly "well set"—that a new landmark of English prose was made by "A Graduate of Oxford," and a very young one, John Ruskin (1819–1900), in the shape of the first volume of *Modern Painters*. Its author was to live nearly as long as Tennyson himself after this his first work, and, though not to fill the whole of his life to the very end with fresh publications, as Tennyson did, to compose a spacious shelf-ful. *Modern Painters* itself was to occupy twenty years and fill six large volumes; *The Stones of Venice* (1851–1853), an almost proportionately voluminous work, took three; and *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) was the first of a long series of smaller books supplemented by curious attempts at a kind of periodical, *Fors Clavigera* (1871 onwards), etc. In these the author, taking, almost for the first time in English, the so-called Fine Arts for his principal subject, and applying his principles in them and his studies of them with an immense expatiation into literature, politics, political economy especially, and almost everything else, developed (partly under the influence of Carlyle) a vast but rather incoherent gospel or set of opinions which does not directly concern us here. But the literary form which the expression of this gospel took concerns us very much. In the first place, the influence of the arts infused into Ruskin's style an Ruskin.

attention to the colour and form of natural as well as artificial objects which only technical writers had hitherto attempted, and which went far beyond even the efforts of the poets from the "Lake" School and Scott in verse onward. Lastly, still in the spirit of these arts, he boldly built up his sentences by innumerable added strokes. Never, since the seventeenth century, had an author dared such long sentences as Ruskin allowed himself; yet these sentences were perfectly clear as well as admirably modulated. His chief fault was indulgence in actual blank verse, though he managed so skilfully as to carry this off in a way. In short, "word-*painting*" became a definite and deliberate art in his hands; and there were many to learn it of him.

Newman, Arnold, and others.

Concurrently, however, with this and earlier, certain other "graduates of Oxford" were producing styles which addressed themselves more to the intellect proper under the influence, in part at least, of the great "Oxford Movement" in religion. The eldest and greatest of these writers, as well as one of the early chiefs of the movement itself, was John Henry Newman (1801–1890), afterwards Cardinal. Newman was a great preacher; but his pulpit practice did not confine him to what is called an oratorical style, and his own is in fact the perfection of the "standard" chastened by a more purely classical form in one direction, but coloured and enlivened not a little by touches approaching Romanticism, and by half-poetic rhythm. Nothing, however, was more abhorrent to Newman than the least gaudiness; and there grew from his example a *newest*-classical manner, which displayed itself, with individual changes, in many writers both in and out of Oxford at the time, and in three Oxford men more particularly. Henry Longueville Mansel (1820–1871), a philosopher as well as a theologian, clave to the severer side in his sermons

and lectures, but almost or quite rivalled Newman in the grave music which he extracted from it. James Anthony Froude (1818–1894) developed in his large *History of England* in Tudor times, in his *Short Studies*, and elsewhere, a variety equally musical and more picturesque, if also more unequal. Matthew Arnold at first wrote a very quiet and classical style, but afterwards, partly from his study of foreign models, added much more "trickery." Yet no one maintained the credit of essay-writing, especially in literary subjects, at a higher level, and no one had so much to do with the recovery and extension of critical practice.

Swinburne (in prose), Morris, and Pater.

All these influences continued to work during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but they were mixed with others still. As usual, the Pre-Raphaelite quality lingered for some time, after showing itself in verse, before it attacked prose, but it did not fail to do so. Morris, as has been said, was a voluminous and effective prose-writer, but not in modern style at all. But Swinburne's criticism fills many volumes, and from its very first considerable example, the *William Blake* of 1868, it displayed, along with great individuality, a very strong blend of Ruskin's manner. And that manner reappeared, though with a still greater personal difference and with some indebtedness to Matthew Arnold, in the last writer to whom [1] we can give prominence here, Walter

[1] As in almost all the chapters of this book, but more than ever, the writer is compelled by want of space to be silent about many of whom he would fain speak. John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) in philosophy, Charles Robert Darwin (1809–1882) and Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895) in science, are instances in two branches of what may be called applied literature; in literature proper, W. E. Henley (1849–1903), a poet and critic of great vigour and originality; Andrew Lang (1844–1912), a master of style in prose and verse alike; and Sir W. S. Gilbert (1836–1911) (see Glossary under "Burlesque"), perhaps the only writer, for more than a century, who has taken away the reproach of the drama by combining theatrical and literary merit of a rare kind. But there are so many others in all divisions that it is dangerous even to name these few.

Horatio Pater (1839–1894). His work and Meredith's, sometimes one, sometimes the other, sometimes both together, have been the latest influences of great power, and display themselves up to this very moment.

On the whole these changes and influences in style worked almost as well in prose as in verse. The business of verse is first of all, if not wholly, to delight—to appeal by the use of musical and pictorial language to those who wish and who are able to *feel*. The business of prose is, first of all, though perhaps not wholly, to instruct, to inform, to develop the opportunities for those who wish to *know*. This has been done, in both directions, by the poetry and by the prose of the nineteenth century, as it had never been done before except between 1580 and 1660. It has not been possible here to give many details—less possible in the case of prose, with its enormous extension to the ever-widening provinces of human knowledge, than in that of poetry, with its appeal, chiefly, though in varying form, to the always more or less stable range of human feeling. But the endeavour has been made to set forth in outline what happened as to *expression* in both these great divisions. For the history of literature is the history of expression.

# ABSTRACT AND CHRONOLOGICAL CONSPECTUS

# OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

Date and place of original composition very uncertain—perhaps in earliest cases Continental, and before A.D. 500. First reference to certainly English authorship in Cædmon story (before 700). First form, "Epic" poetry. Then chiefly religious poetry, etc. Not much, but some of other kinds, and all treated in a single form of verse. Prose early, perhaps in seventh century. *A.S. Chronicle* as early as eighth. Considerable development under King Alfred (ninth century) and Ælfric (tenth). Decay not wholly due to Norman Conquest, appearing before it. As a whole, so far as we possess it (the proportion lost being quite uncertain), remarkably early literature, possessing vigorous, original and promising qualities, but *limited*, and needing the introduction of some new element.

BEFORE A.D. 800.

| Verse. | | Prose. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Authors (?) and Dates. | Books or Pieces. | Authors and Dates. | Books or Pieces |
| Not known, probably before 500, except *Beowulf*, which must apparently be later than 520. | *Beowulf.* *Widsith* *Waldhere.* *Fight at Finsburg* *Deor.* | Authors unknown. Dates usually given for each entry, some as early as c 700. | Various charters, deeds, laws, etc. |
| Cædmon (?), c. 670. | *Genesis and Exodus.* | 755 (?)–1155. | *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.* |
| Cynewulf (??), c. 750 (?). | *Guthlac.* *Andreas.* *Dream of Rood* *Elene.* *Juliana* "*Christ.*" *Fates of Apostles* (?). (With rune 'signature") etc., etc | | |
| Not known. | *Judith.* *Ruin.* *Wanderer.* *Seafarer.* *Address of Soul to Body.* *Phoenix* etc., etc. | | |

## 800–1150 (*c.*).

| Verse: Authors and Dates. | Verse: Books or Pieces | Prose: Authors and Dates. | Prose: Books or Pieces. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Authors unknown. A.D. | | King Alfred; most of writings *c* 885–895. | *Boethius*; *Orosius*; *Bede*; *Pastoral Care.* |
| 937 | Battle of Brunanburh | Bishop Werfrith, *c* 890. | *Dialogues of St Gregory* |
| 991. | Battle of Maldon | Unknown (before 971) | *Blickling Homilies.* |
| *c.* 1000 (?). | "*Rhyming Poem.*" | Ælfric (before and after 1005) | *Homilies*; *Colloquy* (?) etc |
| *v.d.* | Fragments in *Chronicle* | Archbishop Wulfstan (before 1023). | *Homilies and Letters.* |
| *c.* 1100 (?) | "*Grave Poem.*" | Authors and dates unknown; most probably before or only a little after 1000 | *Apollonius of Tyre.*; *Solomon and Saturn.*; *Leechdoms* (Medical Books).; *Anonymous Homilies.* etc |
| | | | (*Chronicle* continuing) |

*Note* —The dates of this conspectus are those, exact or approximate, of the *work*, not those of the authors' *lives*, which will be found in the text itself.

# MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

A long gap—most part of A.D. 1000–1200—from which we have only fragments, but in which English language to some extent, and English prosody and word-order in prose still more, are learning lessons and incorporating their results from Latin and French. About 1200 the first considerable results appear, as below. The process goes on throughout the century, the Teutonic and Romance elements being more and more blended. Towards its end, and during the 14th, Romance appears, and is very largely written, as well as lyric and, possibly, the beginnings of drama. At the end, Wyclif and some others in prose, Gower and above all Chaucer in verse, show the accomplishments of the past 200 years, while Langland gives the greatest result of a curious reaction from metre to alliterative rhythm which had been going on for some time.

## 13TH CENTURY.

| Verse. | | Prose. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Authors and Dates. | Books or Pieces. | Authors and Dates. | Books or Pieces. |
| Layamon, about 1200–1210. | *Brut* | (?) c. 1210. | *Ancren Riwle.* (A certain number of Saints' Lives, Homilies, and almost exclusively religious treatises, and almost entirely anonymous. *History* during this and the preceding century largely written in *Latin.*) |
| Orm, about 1200–1210. | *Ormulum.* | | |
| (Unknown.) Same date or earlier. | *A Moral Ode.* | | |
| (Unknown.) c. 12—?. | *Genesis and Exodus.* | | |
| (Unknown.) (Nicholas de Guildford ?). | *The Owl and the Nightingale.* | | |
| (Unknown.) c. 1250. | *Proverbs* of Alfred and of Hendyng. | | |
| (Unknown.) " | Several religious poems; *A Bestiary*, etc. | | |
| (Unknown.) (?) | The earliest Romances: probably *Havelok and King Horn.* | | |
| Robert of Gloucester, 1298? and others. | *Verse Chronicle of English History.* *Saints' Lives.* | | |

## 14TH CENTURY.

| Verse. | | Prose. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Authors and Dates.** | **Books or Pieces.** | **Authors and Dates.** | **Books or Pieces.** |
| Various unknown, perhaps before 1300 | *Lyrics*, Harl. MS, 2253 and others. | John Wyclif, 1366-1384 (?). | *Sermons.* etc. |
| Richard Rolle of Hampole, 1320-1349. | *Prick of Conscience* and many other religious pieces. | John of Trevisa, 1387. | History. |
| William of Shoreham, c. 1325 (?). | Religious Poems. | Geoffrey Chaucer | *Boethius*, *Astrolabe*, Prose Canterbury Tales. |
| Robert Manning, c 1338 | *Handling Sin* and a Verse Chronicle. | (?) Sir John Mandeville, probably pseudonymous and translated, *c.* 1400. | *Travels.* |
| Unknown, *c.* 1350 (?). | *Cursor Mundi.* | | |
| Laurence Minot, 1352. | War Poems. | | |
| Various, before 1350. | Bulk of Romances. | | |
| Unknown, *c.* 1322. | *Harrowing of Hell.* (First dramatic attempt in English ?). | | |
| *All the above are metrical* | | | |
| Belonging, wholly or partly, to the alliterative revival we have from unknown authors or authors *c.* 1350 (?). | *Patience*, *Cleanness*, *The Pearl*, *Gawain and the Green Knight.* etc | | |
| And from William Langland (?), 1360-1390 (?) | *Piers Plowman.* | | |
| *Metrical again, and writing*, *c.* 1360-1400. | | | |
| John Gower. | *Confessio Amantis.* | | |
| Geoffrey Chaucer. | *Canterbury Tales.* etc. | | |

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# BETWEEN CHAUCER AND SPENSER

Curious inability of Chaucer's followers, even those partly contemporary with him, such as **Lydgate** and Occleve, to continue or copy his work. Probable causes of this. Deficiency of accomplishment in Southern English. Superiority of Middle Scots poetry for a time. Pressure of the allegorical-rhetorical style. "Aureate" diction. Partial reform effected under Italian influence by Wyatt and Surrey. Cautious treading in their steps for a generation. In prose only one masterpiece—Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*—and this rather out of the line of progress. But steady practice in various departments, and great enlargement of vocabulary. Caxton sees superiority of French; and Berners and Fisher try classical-rhetorical devices. Ascham and his friends achieve a fair prose style. The fifteenth century the chief period (*to our knowledge*) of English mediæval drama. The miracle-play becomes more and more varied, and gives birth to other kinds. Great activity and variety of play within and about 1556–1580.

**Verse.**

| Authors and Dates. | Books or Pieces. |
|---|---|
| Lydgate, various and mainly uncertain, 1390 (?)–1446 (?) | *Story of Thebes*<br>*Falls of Princes.*<br>*Troy Book.*<br>*Temple of Glass.*<br>etc. etc. etc<br>(??) *London Lickpenny* |
| Occleve, Ditto (?). | *De Regimine Principum.*<br>*La Male Règle.*<br>*Jonathas.*<br>*Ars Sciendi Mori* |
| Hawes, *c.* 1510 (?). | *Pastime of Pleasure.*<br>*Example of Virtue.*<br>etc. |
| Skelton, 1480 (?)–1529. | *Crown of Laurel.*<br>*Eleanor Rumming.*<br>*Why Come ye not to Court?*<br>etc, etc. |
| Barclay, *c.* 1510–(?). | *The Ship of Fools.*<br>*Eclogues.* |

**Prose.**

| Authors and Dates. | Books or Pieces. |
|---|---|
| Pecock, 1450–54. | *The Repressor.* |
| Fortescue, 1460–70. | *Governance of England.* |
| Capgrave, *c* 1440 (?) | *Chronicle of England* |
| Paston Family and others, 1422–1509. | *The Paston Letters.* |
| Fabyan, 1507. | *Chronicle of England.* |
| Caxton, 1474–91. | Many translations. |
| Malory, 1470. | *Morte d'Arthur.* |
| Fisher, 1510–1530 | *Sermons.*<br>etc. |
| Berners, 1520–35. | Translations of Froissart and Romances |
| More, 1510–35. | *History of Richard III.* and Controversial Tracts. |
| Tyndale.<br>Latimer<br>Cranmer.<br>Coverdale<br>etc, etc.<br>(*r.d.* from 1520 to 1560.) | *Translations of Bible*<br>*Common Prayer Book.*<br>Controversies.<br>*Sermons.*<br>etc. |
| Elyot 1530. | *The Governour.* |
| Cheke, *c.* 1540. | *Letters.*<br>etc. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Wyatt, *d.* 1542. | *Sonnets.* etc. |
| Surrey, *d.* 1547. | *Sonnets.* etc. *Aeneid*, Bk. ii. and iv. |
| Both the above [and other authors] 1557. | *Tottel's Miscellany* |
| Sackville, 1563. | *Induction* and *Complaint of Buckingham* |
| Various authors, 1559–1600. | Other Miscellanies. |
| Gascoigne, 1566–1577 | *Poems* |

SCOTTISH POETS.

| | |
|---|---|
| Barbour, *c.* 1370. | *The Brus.* *Saints' Lives* (?). *Troy Book* (?) |
| Wyntoun, *c.* 1410 | *Original Chronicle.* |
| James I., *c.* 1420 (?) | *The King's Quair.* |
| "Blind Harry," *c.* 1460 | *Wallace.* |
| Henryson, *c.* 1480 (?) | *Testament of Cresseid* *Orpheus and Eurydice* *Robene and Makyne.* *Fables* |
| Dunbar, 1490–1513 (?). | *Twa Maryit Wemen.* *Seven Deadly Sins* *Golden Targe* and minor poems. |
| Douglas, 1513 (?). | *King Hart* *Palace of Honour.* Trans. *Aeneid* |
| Lyndsay, 1520–155 (?). | *Satire of Three Estates.* *Squire Meldrum* *Dialogue of Experience and Courtier.* |
| Scott, Alex., *c.* 1560. | Minor poems |
| Montgomerie, 1580–1610. | *Cherry and Slae* Minor poems. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Wilson, 1553 | *Art of Rhetoric* |
| Ascham, 1545. | *Toxophilus.* |
| (Before) 1568 | *The Schoolmaster.* |
| Gascoigne, 1572 (?) | *Notes of Instruction.* |

DRAMA.

| | |
|---|---|
| Unknown, perhaps earlier than 1400, in some cases | Mysteries. *York.* *Towneley* *Chester.* *Coventry.* *Digby.* etc. |
| Heywood (John) 1530–60 | Interludes. |
| Bale, 1540–50. | *King Johan.* etc. |
| Udall, 1550. | *Ralph Roister Doister.* |
| Still (?), 1566 | *Gammer Gurton's Needle.* |
| Sackville and Norton, 1561. | *Gorboduc.* |

A vast number of anonymous and other plays, 1530–1580.

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# THE GREAT ELIZABETHAN PERIOD, 1580–1603(–10)

Almost contemporaneous development in Verse (Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*), Prose (Lyly's *Euphues*), and Drama (earliest plays of Lyly and Peele) about 1580. Each form at once receives further cultivation. Lyrics in *Miscellanies* and separately; *The Faerie Queene*; historical poems; satires; sonnets. The University Wits in dramas. Shakespeare. His contemporaries, Chapman, Marston, Jonson, Dekker, Webster, etc. Hooker in prose. The Pamphleteers. Suffusion of literature in all branches with enthusiasm, vigour, and curiosity.

| Verse. | | Prose. | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Authors and Dates. | Books or Pieces. | Authors and Dates | Books or Pieces. |
| Spenser, 1579. | *Shepherd's Calendar* | Lyly, 1578–79. | *Euphues.* |
| ,, 1590. | *The Faerie Queene.* | Sidney, 1580(?) onwards. | *Arcadia.* *Apology for Poetry.* |
| Sidney, 1580-86. | *Astrophel.* etc. | Hooker, 1594–97. | *Ecclesiastical Polity.* |
| Greville. | Miscellaneous Poems. | North, 1579. | *Trans. of Plutarch.* |
| Drayton, 1590 onwards. | *Historical Poems.* *Sonnets.* etc. | Florio, 1603. | *Trans. of Montaigne.* |
| Daniel, 1590 onwards. | *Sonnets.* etc. | Bacon, 1598. | First Essays. |
| Warner, 1586. | *Albion's England* | Harvey, Lyly, Nash, Greene, Lodge, Dekker, Breton, 1580–1600. | Pamphlets. Tales. etc. |
| Watson, 1581. | *Sonnets* | Webbe, 1586. | *Discourse of Poetry.* |
| Barnes, Constable, Fletcher, G., senior, Lodge, etc., etc., 1590-1600. | *Sonnets* | Puttenham (?), 1584. | *Art of Poetry.* |

Donne, Hall, Lodge, Marston, Tourneur — 1590–1600 — *Satires*

MISCELLANIES AND COLLECTIONS.

*Paradise of Dainty Devices*, 1576.
*Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions*, 1578.
*Handful of Pleasant Delights*, 1584.
*The Phoenix Nest*, 1593.
*England's Helicon*, 1600
Davison's *Poetical Rhapsody*, 1602.

DRAMA.

"University Wits." — Between 1580 and 1600.
Lyly. 9
Peell. 6.
Marlowe. 7.
Greene. 6
Lodge 1.
Nash. 2
Kyd. 3(?).

Shakespeare, 158(?)–161(?). 37.
Jonson, 1596–1634. 17 (besides masques, etc.).
Chapman, 1596–1616. 15-18.
Marston, 1602(?)–7(?). 7-8.
Dekker, 1600(?)–1640(?). 10-18.
Webster, 1580(?)–1625 8.
Middleton, 1593–1627 21 (and many masques, etc.)
Tourneur, 1607–11 2
Day, c 1606–8. 6.
(*Besides many scores more in this and the succeeding period written by minor or anonymous writers Even the Shakespearian "Doubtfuls" amount in the fullest list to 17 and Heywood is said to have written 200 plays; while hundreds have been lost.*)

Plays too numerous to mention separately. *Numbers* of those existing given.

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# JACOBEAN AND CAROLINE LITERATURE

In some respects very difficult to divide from the preceding, owing to the survival of numerous writers, some of whom reach even the next period. But distinguished by a marked alteration of *temper* (less enthusiasm, more learning and meditation) and some noteworthy technical changes (breakdown of dramatic blank verse and overlapped couplets, etc.). Drama still the most widely practised and striking division of literature. In poetry, though many long poems are written, *lyric* assumes greater and greater predominance. The work of Milton greatest, but rather isolated. One of the chief notes of the time the advance of ornate prose to almost the highest possible pitch, but with some drawbacks. Criticism falls off; prose fiction and the periodical do not much come on, but some special forms, such as the prose "Character," develop and are found useful later. Bacon and Hobbes found English philosophic styles: and the pulpit is in its greatest glory.

**Verse.**

| Authors and Dates. | Books or Pieces. |
|---|---|
| Chapman, 1598–1624. | Translation of Homer. |
| Daniel. Drayton. Jonson. Davies. Donne. | Continuing work till their respective deaths. |
| Sylvester, 1606 | Translation of Du Bartas |
| Beaumont, Sir J., *before* 1627. | *Bosworth Field* etc |
| Fairfax, 1600 | Poems of Tasso. |
| Campion, 1601–17. | *Lyrics.* |
| Browne, W., 1613 (?). | *Britannia's Pastorals.* etc. |
| Wither, 1613–23. | *Shepherd's Hunting.* etc. |
| Fletcher, G., junior, 1610. | *Christ's Victory.* |
| Fletcher, Ph., 1626–50 (?). | *Purple Island.* etc. |
| Basse, *c.* 1613. | *Poems.* |

**Prose.**

| Authors and Dates. | Books or Pieces. |
|---|---|
| "The Authorised Version," 1611. | |
| Bacon, 1605–25 | *Advancement of Learning.* etc. |
| Jonson, *c* 1600–34 | *Discoveries.* etc. |
| Overbury 1614 | *Characters.* |
| Earle, 1628. | *Characters.* (*Microcosmography.*) |
| Burton, 1621. | *Anatomy of Melancholy* |
| Donne, 1615–31. | *Sermons.* |
| Browne Sir T., 1635–58. | *Religio Medici.* etc. |
| Milton, 1640–60. | Pamphlets, *Areopagitica.* etc. |
| Taylor, 1642–67 | *Sermons, Holy Living.* etc. |
| Fuller, 1639–61 | *Holy and Profane States. Good Thoughts.* etc. |

**Heroic Romances.**

| | |
|---|---|
| Marmion, 1637. | *Cupid and Psyche* |
| Chalkhill, *c.* 1630 (?) | *Thealma and Clearchus.* |
| Chamberlayne, 1659 | *Pharonnida.* |

**Sacred Poets.**

| | |
|---|---|
| Herbert, 1620 (?)–1633. | *The Temple.* |
| Crashaw. 1646 | *Steps to the Temple* |
| Vaughan, 1646–1678. | *Silex Scintillans.* etc. |

**"Caroline" Lyrists.**

Herrick, Carew, Suckling, Lovelace, Cleveland, King, Marvell, Stanley, etc., etc. — At different times between 1630 and 1660 — Lyrics Sacred and Profane.

As before several *Miscellanies* or collections of poems under different titles

*Scottish Poets* (but not usually in Scots *dialect*).

Ayton, 1610–38
Drummond, 1613–49
Stirling, 1603–40.
Montrose, 1636–50.
— Various poems.

| | |
|---|---|
| Hobbes, 1642–79 | *Leviathan.* etc. |
| Clarendon, 1646–74 | *History of Rebellion.* etc. |
| Howell 1625–66 | *Letters.* etc. |
| Walton, 1653. | *Complete Angler.* |

**Scottish Prose Writer**

| | |
|---|---|
| Urquhart, 1640–60 | Translation of Rabelais. etc. |

**Drama.**

Beaumont and Fletcher, 1605 (?)–1625. 53.
Massinger, 1614 (?)–39. 18.
Ford, 1606 (?)–(?) 9.
Marmion, 1630–40. 3
Shirley, 1625–66 40 (including Masques, etc.).
Randolph, 1630–35 6.
Suckling, 1637–42. 4.
Davenant, 1625–68.
Brome, 1623 (?)–52 (?). 15
Glapthorne, *c* 1640. 5.
Nabbes 1630 (?)–40 (?). 6
Davenport, 1621 (?)–40 (?) 3.

***In the above numbers plays written by more authors than one may be sometimes included twice. As before, a great number of anonymous plays and plays by minor authors exist, and a much greater are lost or not yet made known.***

*Note.*—The dates of this conspectus are those exact or approximate, of the *work*, not those of the authors' *lives*, which will be found in the text itself.

Revolution, apparently sudden, but really in process of maturing for some time past, comes upon poetry, prose, and drama alike. In poetry the stranger and higher qualities of Elizabethan verse disappear, or remain only to some extent in Dryden, and to a greater in some song-writers. Satiric and didactic writing takes the principal place; and in this Dryden is an absolute master. In prose definite wishes are expressed for plain intelligible businesslike style; and they are met by a group of distinguished prose writers, Dryden again at their head. Parallel changes in dramatic taste lead, on the one hand, to the "Heroic" play (in which Dryden is yet again easily chief), and to a new kind of comedy of manners, in which he figures, but is not so successful—its chief practitioners, Congreve and Vanbrugh, belonging to a younger generation. At Dryden's death and the meeting of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, poetry and prose are both at low water, and the former continues so till the appearance of Pope some ten years later. He sets a fashion of couplet-writing, still on mainly satiric and didactic subjects, which lasts throughout the century. Before very long, however, new forms (blank verse especially) are sought for, and new subjects (especially things of *Nature*). Thomson, Gray, Collins, Cowper, all go in this direction. Meanwhile Swift, Steele, Addison, and Berkeley have in different ways raised prose; but it falls again, and in the middle and later years Johnson, Burke, and Gibbon have to take it up once more and establish a standard style. Drama, after the very early years of the century, falls off in quality, though it is still popular: Goldsmith and Sheridan are about the only noteworthy dramatists of the latter half. About 1760 symptoms of various kinds announce something like a "Romantic" revival, but it lingers until fresh influences, both native and foreign, foster and mature it. Towards the close of the century, Cowper, Crabbe, Burns, and Blake exhibit it poetically in various forms and stages, as well as minor writers in prose and verse and drama. But already, from almost the beginning, two kinds of literature, the novel and the periodical, which have hitherto been delayed, become more and more prominent. Defoe almost starts—certainly restarts—both, and Addison and his friends do much for the periodical before 1725. Between 1740 and 1760 Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne thoroughly establish the novel, which, more or less effectively written in later years, becomes more and more popular. The periodical proceeds more slowly, but does proceed, and gives not only an outlet for literature of the most various kinds, but a new, though not at first abundant, livelihood to men of letters.

**Verse.**

| Authors and Dates. | Books or Pieces. |
|---|---|
| Dryden, 1658–1700. | *Heroic Stanzas* (on Cromwell) Satires—*Absalom and Achitophel.* etc *Fables.* |
| Butler, 1662–77. | *Hudibras.* |
| Marvell, 16[illegible]–77. | *Satires.* |
| Oldham, 1674–79. | *Satires.* |
| Dorset, Rochester, Sedley, Afra Behn — 1660–80 | *Songs and Lyrics.* |
| Garth, 1699 | *The Dispensary* |
| Blackmore, 1695–1712. | Unreadable Epics |
| Addison, Congreve, etc | *Minor Poems.* |
| Prior, 1686–1713 | Poems "of Society |
| Gay, 1713–32 | *Trivia, Fables* etc |
| Young, 1713–62. | *Night Thoughts, Universal Passion* etc. |
| Parnell, 1700–17. | *Poems.* |
| Lady Winchelsea, 1701–14 | *Poems.* |
| Pope, 1709–43. | *Pastorals, Essays, Satires, Dunciad.* etc. |
| Thomson, 1726–48. | *Seasons, Castle of Indolence.* |
| Dyer, 1726. | *Grongar Hill.* |
| Blair, 1743. | *The Grave.* |
| Shenstone, 1741–58. | *Poems.* |
| Collins, 1740–56. | *Odes* |
| Gray, 1747–69. | *Odes* etc. |
| Akenside, 1744–70 | *Pleasures of Imagination* etc. |
| Percy (Editor), 1765 | *Reliques.* |
| Smart, 1763. | *Song to David.* |
| Churchill, 1761–64. | *Satires.* |
| Chatterton, 1765–70. | " Rowley ' Poems. |
| Cowper, 1778–91. | *Poems.* |

**Prose.**

| Authors and Dates. | Books and Pieces. |
|---|---|
| Dryden, 1668–1700. | *Essays and Prefaces.* |
| Temple, 1668–99. | *Essays.* |
| Sprat, 1667. | *History of Royal Society.* |
| Tillotson, 1664–94 | *Sermons.* |
| Halifax, 1682–95. | *Pamphlets.* |
| Locke, 1689–1704. | *Philosophical Writing.* |
| Bunyan, 1656–88. | *Pilgrim s Progress.* etc. |
| Pepys, 1659–70 | *Diary.* |
| Evelyn, 1640(?)–1706 | *Diary* etc. |
| L'Estrange, 1650–1702 | *Newspapers, Pamphlets, and Translations.* |
| Collier, 1636–1714. | Attacks on Drama. |
| Brown, Tom, 1688–1704 | *Miscellanies.* |
| Defoe, 1698–1731. | Miscellaneous Works. 1719–25. *Robinson Crusoe* and other novels. |
| Swift, 1694–1738. | *Battle of Books, Tale of a Tub, Gulliver's Travels.* etc. |
| Addison, 1704–19. Steele, 1701–22. | *Essays* (Periodical). |
| Arbuthnot, 1710–35. | *Miscellanies* (*History of John Bull*). |
| Atterbury, 1691–1723 | *Sermons.* etc. |
| Bentley, 1692–1732. | Work in Theology, Scholarship. etc. 1695. Essay on *Phalaris.* |
| Berkeley, 1709–44. | Philosophical Works. |
| Bolingbroke, 1702–40. | Politics and Philosophy. |
| Butler, 1726–36. | *Sermons, Analogy.* |
| Shaftesbury, 1700–16. | *Characteristics.* |
| Middleton, C. | *Life of Cicero* etc. |
| Novelists: Richardson, 1740–53. | *Pamela, Clarissa, Sir C Grandison.* |
| Novelists: Fielding, 1742–51 | *Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones, Amelia* |
| Novelists: Smollett, 1748–71 | *Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker,* etc |

(*Continued on next page.*)

## AUGUSTAN LITERATURE—*continued*

**Verse.**

| Authors and Dates. | Books or Pieces. |
|---|---|
| Crabbe, 1782–1830. | *Poems.* |
| Blake, 1783–1827. | *Poems.* |
| Burns, 1786–96. | *Poems.* |
| Bowles, 1789. | Sonnets. |
| Wolcot, Ellis, Gifford, Frere, Canning — Last quarter of century. | Satires, chiefly political. |
| Hayley, Darwin, The "Della Cruscans" — Ditto. | Serious but ineffectual Verse. |

**Prose.**

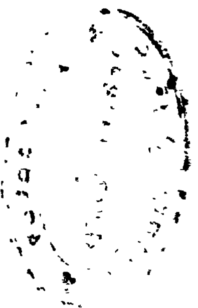
| | Authors and Dates. | Books or Pieces. |
|---|---|---|
| Novelists. | Sterne, 1760–68. | *Tristram Shandy, Sentimental Journey.* |
| Novelists. | Walpole, H., 1764 | *Castle of Otranto.* |
| Novelists. | Beckford, 1784. | *Vathek.* |
| Novelists. | Radcliffe, Mrs., 1789–97. | *Mysteries of Udolpho.* etc. |
| Novelists. | Burney, Miss, 1778–1814. | *Evelina.* etc. |
| Novelists. | Edgeworth, Miss, 1798–1834. | *Belinda.* etc. |
| | Johnson, Dr., 1733–84. | *Dictionary, Rasselas Rambler Lives of Poets.* etc. |
| | Goldsmith 1751–74. | *Vicar of Wakefield* |
| | Hume, 1730–76 | History and Philosophy. |
| | Gibbon, 1761–87. | *Decline and Fall.* |
| | Burke, 1756–96 | *Political Speeches.* etc. |

**Drama.**

| Authors and Dates. | Books or Pieces. |
|---|---|
| Dryden, 1663–94 | Tragedy, Comedy, Opera. |
| Lee, 1675–92. | Tragedy. |
| Otway, 1675–85. | Tragedy, Comedy. |
| Etherege, 1664–76. | Comedy. |
| Shadwell, 1668–92 | Comedy. |
| Wycherley, 1671–77. | Comedy. |
| Congreve, 1693–1700. | Comedy. |
| Vanbrugh, 1696–1705. | Comedy. |
| Farquhar, 1699–1707. | Comedy. |
| Cibber, 1696–1748 | Comedy. |
| Centlivre, Mrs, 1700–22. | Comedy. |
| Steele, 1701–22. | Comedy. |
| Goldsmith, 1768–73. | Comedy. |
| Foote, 1747–77. | Farce. |
| O Keefe, 1778–1820. | Farce. |
| Sheridan, 1775–99. | Comedy and Farce. |

*Note.*—The dates of this conspectus are those, exact or approximate, of the *work*, not those of the authors' *lives*, which will be found in the text itself.

*(Conspectus resumed on next page.)*



# THE FIRST ROMANTIC PERIOD

Great change—partly a reversal of the tendencies prevailing in the preceding period, partly a general advance—due to causes mentioned at close of last Abstract. First manifestation of it the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798. Wide diffusion, at first slow, after 1805 fast and general, of the principle of these in poetry; and constant new appearances of great poets, till that of Keats in 1817. A little later the development communicates itself to prose fiction, and the novel is completely transformed by Scott and Miss Austen. Serious prose retains the "standard" quality, and is largely used in various subjects, but about 1820 some of the qualities and aims of the new poetry appear in prose also. All departments (except drama, which becomes more and more a mere branch of poetry) feel the Romantic influence as a vivifying one. But towards the end of the period the first stage of this slackens, with the death of many of the greatest writers.

**Verse.**

| | Authors and Dates. | Books or Pieces. |
|---|---|---|
| First School—works too many to give titles in most cases. | Wordsworth, 1793–1850. | *Poems of all sorts* |
| | *Lyrical Ballads* 1798 | |
| | Coleridge, 1794–1834. | *Christabel.* etc., etc. |
| | Southey, 1793–1859. | *Ballads* and Long Poems. |
| | Scott, 1799–1832. | Verse Romances and other poems. |
| | Byron. 1806–24. | Ditto. |
| | Shelley, 1810–22. | Ditto. |
| | Keats, 1817–21. | Ditto. |
| | Landor, 1798–1864. | *Gebir.* *Hellenics.* etc. |
| | Moore, 1799–1846. | *Irish Melodies.* *Lalla Rookh.* etc. |
| | Campbell, 1799–1840. | *Pleasures of Hope* etc. |
| | Rogers, 1792–1821 | Poems |
| | Leigh Hunt, 1801–59. | *Story of Rimini.* etc |

**Prose**

| | Authors and Dates. | Books or Pieces. |
|---|---|---|
| Novelists. | Austen, Miss, 1756–1817. | *Northanger Abbey.* etc. |
| | Scott, 1815–32. | *Waverley Novels.* |
| | Ferrier, Miss, 1818–31. | *Marriage.* etc. |
| | Peacock, 1816–31. | *Headlong Hall.* etc. |
| | Hood, 1826–41. | *Sayings and Doings.* etc. |
| Essayists, etc | Jeffrey, 1802–30. | *Edinburgh Review*, Contributions to. |
| | Scott. | *Edinburgh Quarterly Review*, Contributions to. |
| | Sydney Smith, 1832–45. | *Edinburgh*, Contributions to. *Pamphlets.* |
| | De Quincey, 1819–59. | *Confessions of an Opium-Eater.* etc., etc. |
| | Landor, 1824–64. | *Imaginary Conversations.* etc. |
| | Lamb, 1776–1834. | *Essays of Elia.* etc. |
| | Hazlitt, 1805–1834 | *Essays.* |
| | Hunt, 1807–59. | Contributions to *Examiner* and many other papers, as well as books. etc. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "Intermediates." | Hood, 1821–45. | *Poems*, Serious and Comic |
| | Praed, 1828–39 | Ditto |
| | Macaulay, 1842. | *Lays of Ancient Rome.*<br>etc. |
| | H. Coleridge, 1820–49. | *Sonnets.*<br>etc. |
| | H. Taylor, 1820–60 (?). | *Philip von Artevelde.*<br>etc. |
| | Beddoes, 1819–49. | *Death's Jest Book.*<br>etc. |
| | Darley, 1826–46. | *Nepenthe.*<br>*Sylvia.*<br>etc. |
| Essayists, etc. | Hazlitt, 1817–30. | *Essays* and *Lectures* |
| | Cobbett, 1796–1835 | *Weekly Register* and many books. |
| | Southey, 1795–1839. | *Quarterly* and other articles. |
| Historians, etc. | Southey, 1795–1839. | *Histories of Brazil.*<br>etc.<br>*Lives* of Nelson.<br>etc. |
| | Mitford, 1771–1810. | *History of Greece.*<br>*Harmony of Language.* |
| | Roscoe, 1795–1820. | *Lives* of Lorenzo de Medici and Leo X. |
| | Hallam, 1818–39. | *Europe in Middle Ages.*<br>*Constitutional History of England.*<br>*Literature of Europe.* |
| | Mackintosh, 1791–1852. | *Vindiciae Gallicae.*<br>*Dissertation on (Moral) Philosophy.*<br>etc. |

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## VICTORIAN LITERATURE

A new generation, ready to start the slightly arrested development (see last Abstract) afresh. Tennyso and Browning, appearing almost simultaneously, captain the poetry for some sixty years to come, with on or two minor reactions (newest "classical," "spasmodic," etc.), and one great development later (the Pre Raphaelite). Transition lasts a little longer in novel; but about 1845, Dickens having previously appearec Thackeray succeeds at last, and new developments on the lines of both Scott and of Miss Austen continu to be made for the greater part of the century. The revival of ornate prose continues very vigorousl assisted chiefly by Ruskin in the middle generation, by Pater and Meredith in the later. Great extension c historical writing, with attention to manners, literature, etc., in the hands of Macaulay, Carlyle, Froude, an others, all also great Essayists. Revival of criticism under Matthew Arnold. Perfection of older style i Newman, Mansel, and others. Wider and wider extension of periodical writing. Drama still inferior when literary not dramatic, and *vice versa*; sometimes, especially in latter part of century, neither.

| Verse. | | Prose. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Authors and Dates. | Books or Pieces. | | Authors and Dates. | Books or Pieces. | |
| Tennyson, 1830–92. | *Poems.* | Novelists. | Bulwer-Lytton, 1827–73 | *Falkland.* etc. |
| Browning, 1832–89. | *Poems.* | | Beaconsfield, Lord, 1826–80 | *Vivian Grey.* etc. |
| ,, Mrs., 1826–61. | *Poems.* | | Lever, 1837–72 | *Harry Lorrequer.* etc. |
| FitzGerald, 1859. | *Translation of Omar Khayyam.* | | Marryat, 1829–48. | *Peter Simple.* etc. |
| Thackeray, 1830–63. | *Ballads* | | Dickens, 1836–70. | *Pickwick Papers* etc. |
| Kingsley, 1848–75. | *Andromeda.* etc. | | Thackeray, 1830–63. | *Vanity Fair.* etc. |
| M. Arnold, 1843–80. | *Poems.* | | | |
| Spasmodics. Bailey, 1839–67. | *Festus.* etc. | | | |
| Spasmodics. Dobell, 1850–74. | *Balder.* etc. | | | |
| Spasmodics. Smith, A., 1853–67 | *A Life Drama.* etc. | | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Pre-Raphaelites. | Rossetti, D., 1828-82 | *Poems* |
| | " C., 1850-94 | *Poems* |
| | Swinburne, 1859-1910. | *Poems* |
| | Morris, 1855-96. | *Poems* |
| | Dixon, 1855-1900. | *Poems* |
| | O Shaughnessy, 1870-81. | *Poems* |
| | Thomson, J (II.), 1862-81. | *Poems* |
| | Meredith, 1829-1910. | *Poems* |
| | Henley, 1874-1903. | *Poems*. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Novelists. | Brontes, The 1846-54— | |
| | Charlotte | *Jane Eyre.* etc. |
| | Emily. | *Wuthering Heights.* |
| | Reade, 1851-84. | *Peg Woffington.* etc. |
| | Trollope 1847-82. | *Barchester Towers.* etc |
| | "George Eliot," 1857-80. | *Adam Bede.* etc |
| | Kingsley, C., 1848-74. | *Westward Ho!* etc. |
| | Blackmore, 1864-1900. | *Lorna Doone.* etc. |
| | Stevenson, 1878-94 | *Treasure Island.* etc. |
| Essayists and Historians. | Carlyle, 1824-68. | *French Revolution.* etc. |
| | Macaulay, 1825-55. | *History of England.* |
| | Froude, 1844-94 | *History of England.* |
| | Symonds, 1875-93. | *Italian Renaissance.* |
| | Thackeray, Kingsley, Stevenson, as above | |
| | Borrow, 1824(?)-81 | Disguised Autobiography chiefly. |
| | Mill, J. S., 1825-73. | Philosophical Works. |
| | Newman, 1827-90 | *Sermons, Apologia.* etc. |
| | Ruskin, 1843-1900. | *Modern Painters.* etc, etc. |
| | Mansel, 1857-71. | *Sermons* and Philosophical Works. |
| | Pater, 1873-94. | *Essays.* etc. |
| | Darwin, 1840-82 | Scientific Prose. |
| | Huxley, 1848-95. | |

DRAMA.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Gilbert, 1870-1908. | Fantastic pieces combining literary and dramatic merit. |

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# GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL TERMS[1]

**Alexandrine.** A verse of six iambic feet, said to be so named from an early French poem on the legend of Alexander the Great. Used by Spenser to close his stanza, by Dryden and others to vary the heroic couplet. Also in continuous arrangement by a few English poets, the chief of them being Drayton in *Polyolbion*, and Browning in *Fifine at the Fair*.

**Allegory.** Literally a "talking about something else." Used generally for a story in verse or prose where moral, religious, or other senses are conveyed by implication. Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* are the greatest allegories in English; but the most prolific *time* for such things was from 1350 to 1550.

**Alliteration.** The use of words beginning with the same letter or letters. In Old English (where any vowel will also make it) a definite constituent of versification, and revived as such in Middle English poetry during the late fourteenth, fifteenth, and very early sixteenth centuries. Afterwards, and to the present day, very frequently used (though in the Elizabethan and Augustan periods sometimes sneered at), not as a constituent of versification, but as an ornament of verse.

**Anapaest.** A foot of two short syllables ("unaccented," as some call them) and one long ("accented"). Used sometimes by itself, sometimes in Substitution (which see) for iambs in ordinary verse. (◡◡—).

**Anglo-Saxon** (or *Old English*) literature is that from the earliest times to the twelfth century (1155 the chief *known* date).

**Aureate** = "gilded." A term applied to the pompous Latinised forms of words and phrases used in the fifteenth and early

[1] A considerable number of these terms are necessarily prosodic. But the explanation of them has been cut down to the lowest point. The more advanced or more curious student may be referred to *A Historical Manual of English Prosody* (London, Macmillan & Co.). Other items, such as "Classic," "Romantic," "Renaissance," are more fully dealt with.

sixteenth centuries, such as "golden candle *matutine*" for the sun.

**Ballad.** A short poem, generally with some story in it (the "Robin Hood" Ballads are almost our earliest examples), and as a rule in stanzas of short lines. The special "ballad-" also called "common"-measure, is a four-lined stanza, the first and third lines (which have four iambic feet) being sometimes, and the second and third (which have three) being always rhymed together.[1] "Long" (four octosyllables rhymed alternately) and "short" (see *Poulter's*) measures, as well as lengthened stanzas (from five to nine lines), as in *The Ancient Mariner*, are sometimes used. When the French form *Ballade* is employed, it means something different—a poem still short, but seldom telling a story, and with the rhymes the same all through, but arranged in complicated order (see *Triolet*). Such poems were written by Chaucer, Gower, Lydgate, and others in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and also, some thirty or forty years ago, by modern poets.

**Belles-Lettres** (hyphen sometimes disused in English). A French term more properly restricted, in its original language, to rhetoric, poetry, and grammatical or critical writing; but frequently extended, especially in English use, to all branches of literature which are not strictly scientific in intention.

**Blank Verse.** A series of unrhymed decasyllabic lines, which appears first in Surrey's translation of the *Aeneid*, and of which the greatest example, not dramatic, is *Paradise Lost*. Since about 1700 it has been constantly used in non-dramatic poetry, while in drama, since 1570–1580, it has been (save for a very brief interval about 1665–1680) the recognised form for serious plays in verse.

**Burden.** (Or *Refrain*.) The same line (or a line very slightly altered) recurring at the end of stanzas in the same poem.

[1] Typical example:

> The other was a softer voice,
> As soft as honey-dew;
> Quoth he, "The man hath penance done,
> And penance more will do."

The term "ballad-measure" is sometimes, but confusingly and incorrectly, applied to the six-line stanza of Chaucer's *Sir Thopas*

> His shield was all of gold so red,
> And therein was a boarès head,
> A carbuncle beside;
> And there he swore, on ale and bread,
> How that the giant shall be dead,
> Betidè what betide!

There *are* ballads in this metre, but far fewer than in the other. It is, on the other hand, very common in *romances*, and is often called the "romance-six." Its original names in Latin and French were *versus caudatus* or *rime couée* ("*tailed* rhyme"), from the short line following the longer ones.

**Burlesque,** from Italian *burla*, "a jest," is a term sometimes rather loosely used for several comic styles of writing. *Parody* (which see) is one kind of it, and others have been distinguished as "heroi-comic," "mock-heroic," etc. Generally speaking, the burlesque effect is attained, either by taking something more or less grand or serious, and treating it in a ludicrous manner; or by reversing the process and giving apparently solemn treatment to low or ridiculous subjects But, as a rule, these processes are a good deal mixed. *Satire* (which see) often avails itself of burlesque, but by no means always *Pure* burlesque may be found in Chaucer's *Rime of Sir Thopas*, where the weaker romances are parodied, in parts of Butler's *Hudibras*, wherein the Roundhead party is made ridiculous, and in a succession of plays, Buckingham's *Rehearsal* and Fielding's *Tom Thumb*, wherein contemporary dramatic absurdities are travestied or presented in a ludicrous aspect Canning's *Rovers*, where the *Rehearsal* kind is shown combined with political satire, is rather *mixed*. Burlesque drama became again very popular in the middle of the nineteenth century, and, with much that was merely ephemeral, produced the remarkable work of the late Sir William Gilbert (*H.M.S. Pinafore*, *The Mikado*, etc ), which is burlesque of almost the highest kind, transcending mere individual travesty.

**Caesura.** See *Pause*

**Carol.** Originally a dance accompanied with song; then the song only; lastly and specially a *religious* song.

**Chorus.** A lyrical interlude between the acts of Greek plays. Sometimes employed in English, the most famous examples being in *Samson Agonistes*.

**Classic** and **Romantic.** Two words very difficult to explain accurately, but constantly recurring in all modern literary history, and very important to understand, at least in a general way, as early as possible. Their original and derivative meanings have little to do with their applied senses. "Classic" was originally applied to the *classes* into which Roman citizens were divided, and then, by a common figure, to a citizen of the *first* class or to some *excellent* thing or person. As at the *Renaissance* (which see), the ancient literatures of Greece and Rome were (with some reason) thought superior to modern productions, the terms "classics," "classical," etc., were applied to them. "Romantic," on the other hand, originally meant something written in one of the modern languages descended from Latin, especially the first and most important of these, French. But as a large part, and by far the most popular part, of such books consisted of the stories which we now call "Romances," the name was specially affixed to them. In the distinctive sense, however, of the title-words of this note, the meaning is trans-

ferred a long way further. "Classic" with us generally means literature which aims first of all at perfection according to the standards which the Greeks and Romans set up; attention to plot and action, careful and restrained use of language, general submission to rule. ("*Neo*-classic," a term sometimes used in this book, refers to the excessive, inaccurate, and sometimes irrational exaggeration of this system, which characterised the Italian critics of the sixteenth, the French of the seventeenth, and the English of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.) "Romantic," on the other hand, has come to mean the qualities opposed to these, and shown in early French literature, in part of Italian and Spanish, and in almost the whole of English except during what has been here called the "Augustan period"—comparative negligence of rule as such; indulgence of individual character; use of words, even if unfamiliar, to produce the most brilliant effect; judgment by enjoyment of the result rather than by measurement of the means. All sorts of antitheses have been devised to bring out the contrast. Putting aside instances unsuitable to this book, classical *precision* has been opposed to Romantic *vagueness*; Classicism has been said to be "method," Romanticism "energy," and there are many others. But at the present stage the student will derive most benefit from examples. Spenser, Shakespeare, the Caroline lyrists, as well as most of our poets and of our greatest prose-writers since Coleridge, are definitely Romantic. Milton, Dryden, Landor, and perhaps Matthew Arnold are mixed; Addison, Pope, and most of the eighteenth-century writers are classic or neo-classic.

**Comedy** (originally from Greek κῶμος, "a revel"). A kind of drama opposed to Tragedy (which see), as being intended to cause laughter rather than tears, and to reflect actual ordinary life rather than exceptional incidents. Various kinds of Comedy are often (more or less accurately) discriminated in English literary history. "Romantic" comedy, the highest kind of all (exemplified in such a piece as Shakespeare's *As You Like It*), is, as an original thing, English (and perhaps Spanish) only, though it has been imitated in other languages. It combines high poetical and romantic appeal with the moving of laughter, and requires perhaps, if not the very greatest, the most varied powers of any literary kind. "Humour"-comedy, of which Ben Jonson was the inventor, or at least regulariser, takes special oddities or peculiarities of individuals as its main instrument. The "comedy of manners," which, partly imitated from the French, came in after the Restoration, and has more or less persisted since, is an attempt to reflect the society of the day as the author sees it, or thinks he sees it. This, at its best, is sometimes called "high" comedy. "Low" comedy, which at its

lowest is called *Farce*, exaggerates and at the same time degrades the comic appeal by introducing vulgar action and speech, practical jokes, romping, excessive play on words, and the like. At its worst it is perhaps the lowest kind of literature; but a good farce may be a very good, though it is a very difficult thing.

**Dactyl.** A foot of one long and two short syllables (– ⏑ ⏑).

**Distich.** Much the same as "couplet"—two lines of more or less parallel formation. If the A.S. line is separated at the pause, it becomes a distich.

**Doggerel** properly means verse that is incorrect in metre; but it is often used of sing-song or clumsy versification and language, not positively unmetrical. (See on Skelton in text.)

**Eclogue.** Properly, from the Greek ἐκλογή, a "selection" or "extract." Then any short poem, but especially a *Pastoral* (which see).

**Elegy.** Properly, from the Greek ἔλεγος, "a song of mourning." But since a particular metre (a hexameter followed by a pentameter) was much used in these songs, the adjective "elegiac" came to be used of this metre without regard to subject. In English this adjective is sometimes thus applied to the quatrains of Gray's *Elegy* and even of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*.

**Elision,** a term taken from classical prosody, means the "crushing out" of one vowel when two come together. This appears in the suppression of the *e* of the definite article, so common in the eighteenth century, "th' attentive" for "the attentive," and so forth. It was much abused about this period, and perhaps is never really wanted in English verse. (See *Equivalence*.)

**Epic** and **Romance.** Two terms used to distinguish, sometimes ancient and modern narrative poetry, sometimes different kinds of modern. The strict Epic, according to ancient definition, should have grave and dignified treatment, a single main subject—though *episodes* (that is to say, minor stories connected with the subject, but not directly leading to the conclusion) are permitted—a definite hero, and orderly arrangement. Perhaps *Paradise Lost* is the only English poem which thoroughly answers to this; and even there the question has been asked, "Who *is* the hero?" Some have also thought that the older modern poems—the French *Chansons de Geste*, the Icelandic Sagas, perhaps *Beowulf*, etc.—are more like epics than the innumerable stories of the twelfth, thirteenth, and later centuries, which (most of them being originally French; see *Classic and Romantic*) are called Romances. These depend more upon separate incident and less upon connected plot, the construction is often irregular, and the motive of love has more importance

than in the ancient epic. To illustrate further, Spenser's *Faerie Queene* would have been an epic, at least in scheme, if he had carried out the plan which he mentions in his Preface; and some of the Books, especially I., II., and V., have epic character in themselves. But the poem is essentially a romance in treatment, and very large portions of it have no epic character at all.

**Epode.** In Greek the third member of a lyric group after strophe and antistrophe, as in Gray's *Bard.* Horace's Latin Epodes are separate poems, and Ben Jonson uses the name in this way.

**Equivalence** (the great distinction between English and French poetry, which our language owes partly to Latin, but much more to the original habits of Anglo-Saxon) means the acceptance of two short (" unaccented ") syllables as the equivalent of one long (" accented "), and, by consequence, of a three-syllable foot as " equivalent " to a two-syllable.

The free|zing Tana|is through a waste of snows

(which Pope himself thought the most beautiful line he had written) shows this. But most people of that day would have made it by Elision (which see)

The free|zing Tan'is, etc.,

which is hardly beautiful at all.

**Essay.** Properly and derivatively a " trial," perhaps originally, as of metals, in the sense now restricted to the form " *assay* "; but very early used, in the French noun and verb, for " attempt " of any kind. Both meanings seem to combine in the literary use of the term, which dates from the sixteenth century, and was made popular all over Europe by Montaigne. This use, from the beginning, has properly designated a treatment of subjects on a smaller scale and in a lighter manner than a formal " book " requires. Exceptions such as Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding*, whether due to real or false modesty, are better not imitated.

**Farce.** See *Comedy*

**Feminine** rhyme = double—strictly with the final *e* counting.

**Fifteener.** See *Fourteener*.

**Foot.** The combination of syllables, long and short, " accented " and " unaccented," which constitutes and determines the character of *Metre* (which see). The three commonest feet in English are the iamb, the trochee, and the anapaest; next come the spondee and dactyl (see all these names). Perhaps no others are indisputable.

**Fourteener.** A line of seven iambic feet or fourteen syllables at the lowest.

"The stars are dimly seen among the shadows of the bay."

If there is a double or feminine rhyme, this becomes a "*fif-teener*."

**Heroic** is a word used in several significations which it is important to distinguish. The original application came from Italian criticism in the later sixteenth century, when the term "heroic" poem was used to denote something like the "epic" of the ancients (who had themselves used the word in regard to epic itself, and to epic verse), but with less strict rules and a greater approach to the variety of romance. Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* is a pattern "heroic" poem, though Milton himself applied the name to *Paradise Lost*. From this the term passed to the prose romances, which (though our English *Arcadia* is one of the earliest of them) were principally written in France during the first half of the seventeenth century, and then to the "heroic play" of Dryden and his contemporaries, which was to a large extent imitated from those romances. But there also grew up a habit, partially justified, as has been said, by the ancients, of applying the term "heroic" to the particular *verse* used for epic or heroic poetry. And so we speak of the "*heroic* couplet" of two decasyllables or (less commonly) of the decasyllable itself as the "*heroic*" line.

**Hexameter** and **Pentameter.** Two lines very largely used, either together or (in the case of the hexameter) alone, in Greek and Latin poetry. The hexameter consists of *six* feet, dactyls or spondees (which see) at pleasure, except that the fifth is usually a dactyl and the sixth always a spondee. The pentameter is of *five*, but curiously split up into halves of two and a half feet, according to some minor rules not here important. Ever since the Renaissance, attempts have been made to introduce these lines, and especially the hexameter, in English (see *Manual of English Prosody*), but never successfully. Moreover, an extremely bad habit has grown up of using "hexameter" to mean the English Alexandrine, "pentameter" still more commonly for the English heroic, and "tetrameter" for the English octosyllable. This is quite unnecessary, really ignorant, and altogether confusing, unscholarly, and wrong, for an iambic "pentameter" line would be one of *ten* feet, and "hexameter" has been used for centuries by itself in a special and totally different acceptation.

**Homily.** A sermon, generally rather short. Term specially used in relation to Old and Early Middle English discourses

**Humour.** See *Wit*, and text, p. 222, under Thackeray.

"**Humours.**" See *Comedy*, and text, p. 103, under Jonson.

**Iambic.** A foot of one short (or "unaccented") syllable followed by one long (or "accented"). The commonest in English verse since the twelfth century. (◡–)

**Interlude.** A kind of drama, often allegorical, which was very popular in the early and middle sixteenth century. The name most obviously means "a play interposed between two other things, plays or not; but a "play between two or more *persons*" has been suggested, and neither will always suit.

**Lyric.** Almost everybody knows a lyric when he sees it; but it is less easy to define than to recognise, and people have contended a good deal about the exact meaning of the word. The original and derivative sense is "something accompanied by the *lyre*," the great Greek musical instrument; and some have thought to make it simply equivalent to "song." No doubt any lyric may be sung; but so may many things that are hardly lyrics. Others, looking at the *substance*, have urged that a lyric must be something expressing the direct thoughts and emotions of the poet; but this is obscure, difficult to apply, and probably much too narrow. And yet others, looking chiefly at the *form*, have thought that it must be a poem rather short than long; capable of being sung; excluding those regular and unvaried metres which are generally used for poems of great length, such as the hexameter in Greek and Latin, the heroic couplet and blank verse in English. It has also been said that lyrics are that kind of poetry which is farthest away from prose Whether a Ballad and whether a Sonnet is a lyric are questions on which the student may reserve decision till later. Examples are better for him at this time. Spenser's *Epithalamion* and Milton's *Lycidas* are lyrics; but so are Shakespeare's "Under the Greenwood Tree" and Lovelace's "Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind." Wordsworth's *Ode on Recollections of Immortality* comes under the heading, as well as Keats's "In a Drear-nighted December" and Shelley's "O World! O Life! O Time!" But nobody would call *Paradise Lost* or the *Faerie Queene*, *Absalom and Achitophel* or *The Dunciad* a lyric.

**Magazine** and **Review.** See text, p. 260, *note*.

**Masque.** See text, p. 102.

**Measure,** "Common" and "Long," see *Ballad*. For "Short," see *Poulter's*.

**Melodrama** originally meant (from the Greek μέλος) drama where music and song are introduced. But from some association, accidental rather than essential, it has come to mean a drama of incident, always rather exaggerated, and generally in the tragic or tragi-comic (which see) direction.

**Metre.** An arrangement of a line in some definite rhythm

(which see) and of lines in correspondence with each other. The point distinguishing poetry from prose

**Middle English.** A term applied, perhaps most properly, to the literature between 1200 and 1400, but sometimes extended to include that of the fifteenth century. *Early* Middle English generally means that of the thirteenth.

**Octave.** A stanza or set of eight lines rhymed in various orders. The most famous is the Italian *Ottava rima*, which concludes with a heroic couplet (lines of eleven syllables in Italian, of ten usually in English). Interesting examples of different kinds of octave in English are Chaucer's *Monk's Tale* and Byron's *Don Juan*.

**Ode.** A Greek word meaning anything sung. It is specially, though not universally (the numerous exceptions being due mainly to Horace's example) taken to mean a rather elaborate composition in concerted metre.

**Old English.** See *Anglo-Saxon* (which, it may be observed, is not only the older name, but has been kept by some of the best scholars, Continental as well as English, to the present day).

**Opera.** An Italian term meaning "work." It began to be applied in English, in the later seventeenth century, to theatrical entertainments, which included much music and spectacle. At first in Dryden, and even in Gay, the literary part remained important; but it has since been largely reduced if not abolished.

**Pamphlet** (derivation questioned), a small book, of a sheet or two only, stitched together, not bound. Used for all sorts of subjects in reference to Elizabethan literature, but in modern times commonly restricted to controversial or occasional writings.

**Parody** is a peculiar form of burlesque in which the verse and phrase of the original—generally a poem, but not always—are kept as nearly as possible, but caricatured and made laughable, though not by any means necessarily contemptible Parody is very old—as old, even in what we have, as Aristophanes (fifth century B.C.). But in English the nineteenth century was particularly fertile in it, and there are no better parodies than those of *Rejected Addresses* (1812) by James and Horace Smith, the *Bon Gaultier Ballads* (1845) by Professor Aytoun and Sir Theodore Martin, the works of C. S. Calverley (1831–1884) and "Lewis Carroll," H. D. Traill (1842–1900), and others. The excellence and indeed the possibility of parody depend upon the presence of some distinct "mannerism," as it is called, in the original writer parodied. Nobody has ever parodied Shakespeare to any effect; almost any clever youth can parody Milton.

**Pastoral.** See text, p. 67, *note*.

**Pause** (sometimes called by the Latin name *caesura*) is the

break in the line at the end of a word, which to some extent makes two parts of it, and may be used so as to diversify the rhythm. Its varied employment is one of the things which most distinguish classic and neo-classic verse from others. Pope, for instance, almost always has one pause, and that near the middle. Shakespeare and Milton put it anywhere, introduce several pauses in a line, and (Shakespeare especially) sometimes have none at all. In the use of the pause lies the great secret of blank verse.

**Picaresque.** See text, p. 161.

**Pindaric.** Properly, a very complicated system of versification adopted by Pindar and other Greek poets, the structure of which will be found exactly reproduced in Gray's *Bard*. Improperly used (by Cowley first, and by many others after him) to denote a much easier system of constructing stanzas of irregular length, composed of verses also of different lengths, and rhymed in no regular order.

**Poetical Justice.** The punishing of vice and rewarding of virtue in dramatic, poetic, or other fiction. It requires to be very carefully managed, as the result is equally offensive whether it be clumsily exaggerated and obtruded, or ostentatiously neglected. It is usually a great instrument of the melodramatist (see *Melodrama*).

**Poulter's Measure.** The couplet of Alexandrine and fourteener, much used by the earlier Elizabethan poets:

> Laid in my quiet bed, in study as I were,
> I saw within my troubled head a heap of thoughts appear.

It breaks up easily into a quatrain of lines containing respectively six, six, eight, and six syllables, and is then called "Short Measure," as often in hymns:

> To keep the lamp alive,
> With oil we fill the bowl;
> 'Tis water makes the willow thrive,
> And grace that feeds the soul.

**Quatrain.** A batch or stanza of *four* lines, as in Gray's *Elegy* (decasyllabic) and Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (octosyllabic).

**Redundance** is the allowance of an extra syllable at the end of a line:

> Into | a bit|ter fash|ion of | complain|ing.

**Refrain.** See *Burden*.

**Renaissance** (lit. "re-birth." Matthew Arnold, some time ago, introduced the form "Renascence," which should be avoided,

for there is no Latin word *renascentia*, and "Renaissance" is a distinct technical term of *time*, especially current as regards architecture while "renascence" would be general. There have been at least three or four distinct "renascences" in English literature, but only one "Renaissance") A term applied to the period of fresh and direct study of the ancient classics, which, with other influences, resulted in the passage of mediaeval into modern literature, art, philosophy, and many other things. This began in Italy very soon after Dante's time, and was specially active there during the fifteenth century. From Italy it passed to France, and from France to England. With us it hardly begins till the early sixteenth, and may be said to last throughout that century, but it is at all times much more strongly romantic and less specially classic than with the Southern nations Spenser, Shakespeare, and Bacon show the different sides of the English Renaissance best. But when the word is used generally, there is usually a more distinct reference to the *classical* revival and influence

**Rhetoric.** Originally the art of oratory; then the art of writing, or at least *prose*-writing, generally. In modern times a bad sense is sometimes attached to the word and its adjective "rhetorical," so as to mean something pompous in style and insincere in meaning.

**Rhyme** is the employment of (usually final) syllables of the same sound in corresponding places of lines or verses, as in

> A King's *face*
> Should show *grace*.

Sometimes there is also "middle" or "internal" rhyme, as in

> The votive frigate *soft, aloft*,

or

> For a promise *broke*, not for first words *spoke*,

or

> The thatch of the *byres* will serve their *fires*, when all the cattle are slain.

For "full" or, as it is sometimes called, "consonant" rhyme in English, the consonants following the vowel must be the same; "*a*ssonance" or rhyme on the vowel only (as "f*a*ce" and "gr*a*te") is not allowed with us. So also the same words (*i.e* the same in consonants before as well as after the vowel), even if they have, and are used in, different senses, are forbidden in English The student may sometimes see the term "*head*-rhyme." This is an unnecessary and confusing substitute for "alliteration," and should be avoided. The word is also spelt

"rhime," "ryme," and "rime," and at one time was thought to come from A.S. *rim*. It is, however, more probably through Fr. *rime* (*rithme*), from Latin and Greek *rhythmus* (ῥυθμός), and is thus the same *word* as "rhythm." In any case "rhyme" is the best spelling, to avoid confusion with "hoar-frost."

**Rhyme Royal.** A stanza of seven decasyllabic lines rhymed *ababbcc*.[1] First used in English by Chaucer in *Troilus*; very frequent in the fifteenth century, occasionally used till the seventeenth, then almost entirely dropped till taken up by William Morris.

**Rhythm.** The arrangement of words in such order as to produce a recognisable musical effect. Repeated or correspondent rhythm becomes *Metre* (which see).

**Romance.** See *Epic and Romance*.

**Romantic.** See *Classic and Romantic*.

**Satire.** A kind or kinds of literature, the name, origin, and nature of which are subject to some confusion. There are two etymological sources for it which have no real connection with each other—the Greek *Satyr*, a demi-god of fantastic and disorderly attributes (whence the Satyric drama, a sort of farce or after-piece to serious plays), and the Roman *satura*, a kind of popular medley, permitting, but not necessarily employing, abuse of individuals. The Greeks themselves had used many forms of satiric literature (as Aristophanes in comedy and Archilochus in lyric) for what we call satiric purposes; but the Romans justly prided themselves on having originated the regular "satire" (which they also, and later, called *sermo*) of Ennius, Lucilius, Horace, Persius, Juvenal, etc. This is a moral discourse in verse, often attacking individuals, but always, or almost always, keeping the general moral or at least social purpose in view. But they also, as in Catullus, Martial, and Horace himself, used lyric as a vehicle of satire, and probably, though we have none left, drama also. In English we have adopted all these meanings and applications of the word, but have to some extent kept the Roman specialisation. In the wide sense any form of prose or verse, sermon or novel, oration or history, philosophical dialogue or what not, may "satirise" things or persons, states of society, religious or political conditions, etc. etc. But the word "Satire" in the stricter sense is still kept for something like, and at first directly imitated from, the Latin *sermo*—as the satires of Marston, Hall, Donne, and others in Elizabethan times; those of Oldham and of Dryden (the greatest of all) after the Restoration;

[1] These letter-symbols are always used to indicate the *order of rhyming* in the lines. Here, for instance, the first line rhymes to the third, the second to the fourth and sixth, and the two last together. Numerals are used in the same way to designate the *number of syllables* in each line. Thus 8686 is the "common" measure.

Young's and Pope's and Churchill's in the eighteenth century. Yet since the Romantic revival at the beginning of the nineteenth this kind, though practised by Byron, and imitated from him by the first Lord Lytton (Bulwer), by the late Mr. Alfred Austin, and others, has constantly declined, and no attempt to revive it has produced anything of the first class.

**Sestet.** A batch or stanza of six lines. Sometimes called sixain, and even (very wrongly and absurdly) "sextant."

**Sonnet.** A poem of fourteen lines, sometimes, but in English rarely, extended to eighteen or more. The arrangement of the rhymes of the sonnet varies greatly in Italian, its original language. In English the two principal forms are the so-called "English" or "Shakespearian" form of three quatrains and a couplet, and the Italian or "Petrarchian" form of an "octave" and "sestet," the latter with intertwisted rhymes.

**Spondee.** A foot of two long ("accented") syllables (— —).

**Stave.** A term often applied to the unit of Anglo-Saxon or Old English verse to distinguish it from the metrical "line" of Middle and later literature. A fair specimen of its ordinary form is

Wridað under wolcnum wynnsum geblowen.

Writheth [in the sense of "growing up," "flourishing"] under welkins [clouds] winsomely blowing.

But it is sometimes immensely extended, as in

Gelic was he þam leohtsum steorrum Lof sceolde he Dryhtens wyrccan.

Like was he to the lightsome stars. Praise should he of God work out.

**Strophe** and **Antistrophe** (lit. "turn" or "twist" and "counter-turn"). Elaborate stanzas in Greek lyric poetry, where in the strophe each line may be different from the next, but every one must have a corresponding line in the antistrophe. The pair are completed by another form, the *Epode* (which see).

**Style.** A term used with rather varying senses. Derived originally from the name of the Roman writing instrument, it was early employed, in Latin itself, to designate the *manner* of writing, and soon extended to that of speaking. It thus came to mean, in the modern languages, composition generally, and, more particularly, the special way of writing and speaking shown by different authors, or usual in different kinds of writing—"the style of Milton," "the oratorical style," "the familiar style," etc. As early as the sixteenth century it was described by a Spanish writer in Latin as "a habit of speech flowing from each man's nature," and this was more epigrammatically repeated two

centuries later by the French naturalist Buffon (in words rather differently quoted) as "le style c'est l'homme [or *de* l'homme] même." Still more recently there has been a tendency to speak of "style" more in the abstract, as something, if not exactly separable from "meaning," yet capable of being considered independently thereof. Controversies exist on this subject, and for some time the student had perhaps better content himself with the earlier meanings of "way of writing" as found in individual writers, in different classes of books, and at different periods of the same literature.

**Substitution.** The use of one foot for another on the principle of *Equivalence* (which see), as of the trisyllabic for a dissyllabic in the example given.

**Terza Rima.** A stanza (or triplet) of three lines, the first and third rhyming together, the middle rhyming to the first and third of the next.

As in that trance of wondrous thought I lay,
This was the tenor of my waking *dream*.
Methought I sat beside a parting way

Thick strewn with summer dust, and a great *stream*
Of people there was hurrying to and fro,
Numerous as gnats upon the evening *gleam*.

"Fro" will rhyme to the next stanza in the same way.

**Tragedy.** A serious drama, with an unhappy ending, which appeals, more or less throughout, to the *sympathies* of the audience or reader. Mere misfortunes, sufferings, and deaths are not in themselves necessarily tragic, though the word is constantly thus misapplied. True tragedy (and it is most noticeable that Aristotle and Shakespeare, who have sometimes been thought irreconcilable, both agree here) involves, on the part of the person or persons principally concerned, some fault, not in itself of a hateful character, which brings about his unhappy end, such as Hamlet's irresolution; Lear's selfish relinquishment of his crown, thoughtlessness of consequences, and violent temper; Othello's unreasoning jealousy; even Macbeth's ambition. We must not only be sorry for, or awed at, the event, but for and at the human circumstances and characteristics which have brought about the event.

**Tragi-comedy.** A word obvious enough in its literal meaning, "a mixture of tragedy and comedy," but rather variously used. The severe neo-classic critics (see *Classic*), who regarded this mixture as bad in itself, held all Shakespeare's tragedies (and most of his "Histories"), except perhaps *Titus Andronicus*, to be tragi-comedies. More rationally, "tragi-comedy" is used

either of a play with a happy ending, which has some elements in it that might have turned to tragedy (as in Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*, and still more his *Measure for Measure*), or positively tragic scenes, as in *A Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*; or else of one which blends a tragic plot and a comic one, having little or nothing to do with each other, except that the same characters may figure in both. This last is not a good kind, and Shakespeare never indulges in it; but it is common in other Elizabethans and in Restoration dramatists. Such scenes as the Gravediggers' in *Hamlet* and the Porter's in *Macbeth*—even as those of the Fool's and Edgar's satire or gibberish in *Lear*—do not constitute a tragi-comedy, for they are often simply foils or reliefs to throw up the tragedy higher, and the humour of them itself sometimes grows tragic in the context

**Triolet.** One of several artificial but pretty forms of verse, which were largely practised in France, and to some extent in England, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It consisted of eight lines; the first repeated twice as fourth and seventh, the second once as eighth. The form of this class most imitated in English, as for instance by Chaucer, was the *ballade* (see above), a piece with variations, but most commonly in three stanzas with a burden or refrain at the end of each, and a shorter fourth or *envoi*, summing it up with the refrain likewise.

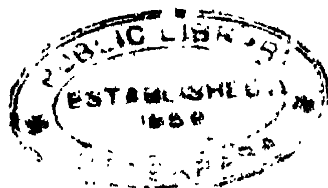
**Triplet.** A batch of *three* lines rhymed more or less with each other.

**Trochee.** A foot of two syllables, one long ("accented"), one short ("unaccented"). The common foot (if we may speak of feet at all there) in A.S verse, and quite usual in later English. (– ◡)

**Unity** and **Unities.** Terms much used at one time in critical discussion of poetry and drama "Unity" generally means composition under some definite and single plan, not random and haphazard writing. The "Unities" of Action, Time, and Place were rules supposed to be derived from Greek, and incumbent on modern dramatists

**Verse Paragraph.** An arrangement, of blank verse more particularly, in which more or less long batches of lines are connected together, not merely in sense, but by devices of pause and overlapping in the lines themselves. First developed, if not exactly discovered, by Shakespeare, very largely used by Milton, and copied from the two by later poets.

**Wit** (and **Humour**). The natures and differences of these two modes of the comic or jocular have been much discussed. The best short distinction is that Wit appeals solely to the understanding; while Humour blends with this an appeal to the emotions.



# INDEX OF NAMES AND TITLES

(*For* SUBJECTS *see Contents. The Chronological Conspectus, being a sort of cross-index in itself, just as this is an Alphabetical Conspectus, is not here included.*)

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